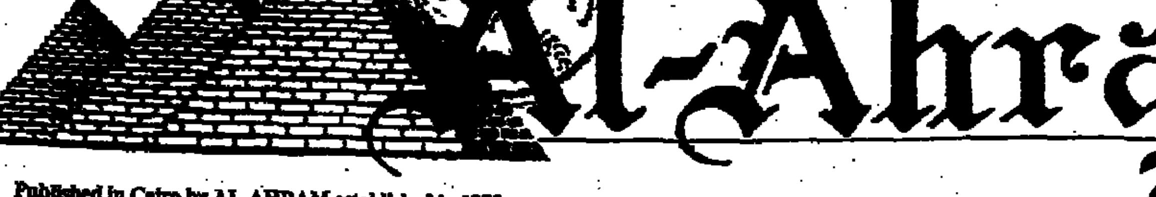
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Mahathir Mohamad, portrait of the week by Bahgory 12

Sudan thaw

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak met yesterday with Sudan's First Vice-President Lt. Gen. El-Zobeir Mohamed Saleh, who arrived in Cairo earlier in the day in what appears to be a bid to improve strained relations.

Mustafa Osman Ismail, the Sudanese state minister for foreign affairs, speaking to reporters after the meeting, said any problems between the two countries should be solved by dialogue.

Ismail expressed hope that all problems between the two countries would soon be addressed so that their relations could "return to normal". For his part, presidential adviser Osama El-Baz expressed hope that yesterday's meeting would lead to an improvement in bilateral relations, which he described as "very special." "We are talking now about a general framework and the specifics will be addressed later," El-Baz said. "We need time to make progress."

No deal

FOREIGN Minister Amr Moussa said yesterday there was "nothing new on the Azam case" — an allusion to the convicted Israeli spy now serving a 15-year prison term.

Moussa was answering reporters' questions following an Israel Radio report that a deal was being negotiated between Cairo and Tel Aviv to release Azam in return for the freedom of a group of Egyptian prisoners currently held in Israeli jails. The station cited Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv Mohamed Bassiouni as the source of its report.

"A verdict was pronounced in relation to Azam and this verdict will be respected and implemented," said Moussa. He added: "As President Hosni Mubarak had said, pardoning Azam is a matter that would have to follow the legal forms set down."

Moussa said Bassiouni was merely reinterating official Egyptian statements. There are "no new developments," he said.

Back in Libya

SOUTH African President Nelson Mandela received a hero's welcome yesterday on his second visit to Libya in the space of a week, but there were no signs of progress in his reported attempts to mediate in the Western-Libyan dispute over the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, **Khaled Dawoud** reports from Zwarah, Libya.

Mandela, on his way back from Scotland where he attended a Commonwealth summit, was reportedly seeking to persuade Britain to accept a Libyan proposal to hold the trial of the two Libyan suspects in the Lockerbie bombing in a neutral country. The US and Britain insist the suspects be tried in either of the two countries

More than 2,000 Libyans packed the Zwarah city stadium where a special celebration was held for Mandela. The South African president awarded Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi his country's highest decoration for foreign leaders, the Order of Good Hope. (see p.6)

INSIDE

How green is my desert

As Egypt moved to maximise its water resources, President Mubarak stressed that Israel would not benefit. Nevine Khalil watched history in the making

More than 100 officials, dignitaries and media people stood on a patch of desert land to watch as President Hosni Mubarak pushed the button. Four giant metal gates slowly opened to unleash a flood of murky water that lazily made its way through the El-Salam irrigation canal. For the first time in modern history, Nile water was flowing through the Sinai Desert. The ceremony at Ras El-Esh — scene of a major battle during the 1967 war — on a warm if breezy Sunday morning was in sharp contrast to the hustle and bustle under the scorching sun that marks the periodic presidential visits to a similar desert-reclamation project at Toshka in Upper Egypt. After a few moments of silence and awe, the crowd surged forward to get a better view of the canal which will turn 400,000 feddans of North Sinai green.

A few minutes earlier Mubarak had unveiled a plaque to commemorate the event and listened to a comprehensive report on the project from the Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources Mohamed Abu Zeid. By turning a large chunk of the Sinai into farmland, the scheme will expand Egypt's inhabitable land.

The 261km El-Salam Canal begins at a point near Damietta, runs eastward and then dips down 14 metres to pass under the Suez Canal in four tunnels to reach the Sinai Desert. Costing LE5.7 billion, and scheduled for completion by 2002, the canal will terminate at a point south of El-Arish. Only around 16.5 per cent of the funding for the North Sinai development project is foreign, mainly from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Japan.

Peopling Sinai is of strategic importance to Egypt, not only to enlarge the country's populated area, but also to serve as a buffer zone on the nation's eastern flank, following the experience of the 1967 war when Israeli armour rolled right across Sinai meeting little or no resistance.

Although absent at the peaceful ceremony, Israel continued to cast a shadow, the issue this time around being whether Egypt would provide its neighbour with a new water source. Mubarak was adamant in rejecting this possibility. "This is an Egyptian project and we will not give water away to anyone," he told reporters. He added that Egypt's water quota agreement with other Nile basin countries does not allow it to channel Nile water to other countries.

The digging of the El-Salam Canal began when President Anwar El-Sadat was in power. On its completion, El-Salam Canal will extend for 86 kilometres west of the Suez Canal and for 175 kilometres across North Sinai, carrying 4.4 billion cubic metres of water annually. Its sources will include not only the Nile but treated agricultural sewage water. The section west of the Suez Canal cost LE300 million, and irrigates 220,000 feddans of agricultural land in the governorates of Damietta, Daqahliya, Sharqiya, Ismailia and Port Said.

Around LE850 million has been spent so far on the eastern section, most of which came from the Kuwaiti Economic Development Fund, which provided Egypt LE655 million in soft loans — hence the name Sheikh Jaber El-Sabah Canal at the point where the tunnels emerge from beneath the Suez Canal. The Saudi Arabian Economic Development Fund provided LE83 million. The four tunnels took nearly four years to complete at a cost of LE188 million.

Time to kill

In his opening speech at the Knesset's new session Netanyahu poured cold water on any hopes of progress in the peace process, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

When Israeli leader Binyamin Netanyahu rose on Monday to address the opening of the Knesset's winter session, he was met by an ambush of placards held aloft by several Labour opposition members. "I am a proud Jew" and "Bibi factionalises Jerusalem" were among the slogans, referring to off-the-record comments Netanyahu made last week to the effect that "the [Israeli] left had forgotten what it means to be Jewish".

Caught off stride, Israel's prime minister said his remarks had been "twisted" and that he had not intended to "cast doubt on anyone's Judaism." He then proceeded with a speech that cast doubt on everything else.

Netanyahu said he was interested in reaching peace with Syria and Lebanon, but that the occupied Golan Heights were "essential" to Israel's security and that there would be no unilateral withdrawal from occupied south Lebanon without "true security arrangements".

On the Palestinian front, he accused the Palestinian Authority (PA) of "regressing" on security agreements with Israel by reopening Hamas affiliated institutions and releasing arrested Palestinians (The same day had seen Israel free 26 Palestinians as a further instalment on the deal struck with Jordan after the Misha'al affair, but Netanyahu ducked any comparison). In such circumstances, there was "no reason" for Israel to offer further pullbacks from the West Bank. As for settlements in East Jerusalem and elsewhere, "we will continue to build," said Netanyahu.

US officials said they were "surprised" by the tenor of Netanyahu's speech since further redeployment and settlements are two of the issues that were supposed to be discussed by Palestinian and Israeli negotiators in Washington this week. Israel's Foreign Minister and chief negotiator David Levy, was also caught unawares.

On 24 October, Levy said he would not travel to Washington without clear mandates from Netanyahu on the content of a settlement "time out" and Israel's stalled second phase redeployment from the West Bank. "How can I go when there is no government decision, and when I don't know what to yield or what to agree?" he asked Israel's Channel 1 TV.

Following a meeting between Levy and Netanyahu on Monday, it was agreed that an inner cabinet discussion would be held on 29 October to hammer out "mandates" for the Washington talks. Should a common negotiating position have been agreed at yesterday's meeting, the earliest Levy can travel to Washington will be Friday. If not, the negotiations are likely to be deferred for a month, given Madeleine Albright's attendance at the Doha economic summit in Qatar in mid-November. Palestinian negotiators have said they won't attend any talks unless settlements and further redeployment are on the agenda. According to Israeli press reports, the only issues Netanyahu is prepared to discuss concern the Palestinian airport in Gaza and plans for an Israeli-Palestinian industrial park.

Palestinians suspect that Netanyahu is playing for time, since decisions on further redeployment or a time out on settlement construction could break his fractious coalition. But there are signs that the Israeli leader's obstructionism is no longer merely tactical.

In his speech to the Knesset, Netanyahu finally abandoned all pretence that his government is in any way committed to Oslo's interim agreements. "The final status agreement is peace," he said. "All these different interim agreements do not amount to peace and do not bring us closer to this goal. Whoever rejects the accelerated track towards final status demonstrates that he is not interested in true peace, but only wants to attain assets and rights which will serve as instruments to maintain the struggle against us and to press more claims against us."

It is a stance that could not be further removed from the current Palestinian position, says the PA's cabinet secretary, Ahmed Abdel-Rahman. For the Palestinians, "all the essential issues from the interim period must be implemented before there can be any jump to the final status negotiations," he says.

The reason the Palestinians need implementation of the interim agreements is the same as Netanyahu's desire to skip them. "Palestinians must be able to stand on their own feet before embarking on the final status negotiations", says Abdel-Rahman. "We can stand on our feet if there is further redeployment, if a safe passage is established between Gaza and the West Bank and if the Gaza airport and harbour are allowed to function. With these, we can stand. Without them, we remain under occupation."

Netanyahu and much of his coalition seem to prefer things that way, hoping, via attrition, to wear down the Palestinian side until it agrees to Oslo on their terms. If, however, the Israeli leader feels he can play for time, time for the PA is running out, says Abdel-Rahman. "Given the current pressure on us, it would be impossible for Arafat and the PA to endure another three years of Netanyahu," he says. "It is a matter of months not years before the PA loses control, before the people take the authority from us."

In such a scenario, he advises Netanyahu to "close the file on Oslo and go shake hands with Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. They can both take the country to the desert!"

Boycott call

ALL eight member organisations of the PLO have called for an Arab boycott of the Middle East and North Africa economic conference to be held in Doha, Qatar, in November, in protest at Israeli policies.

In a statement faxed to Reuters on Tuesday and signed by the PLO organisations, including Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's Fatah, the Doha conference was described as a stab in the back to the interests and ambitions of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian Authority, which is in charge of the self-rule areas in the West Bank and Gaza, has yet to decide whether it will send a delegation to the conference or not.





CONTINUOUS CONSULTATIONS: Mubarak with Yemen's Saleh and Palestinian leaderArafat during their three-way talks on Sunday; with Boutros Ghali; and president of the Israeli Industrial Association, Proper

Looking for an opening

Despite a busy schedule this week, President Mubarak continued to give top priority to ways of reviving the stagnant peace process, and its effects on next month's economic conference in Doha. **Nevine Khalil** reviews the president's diplomatic diary over the past few days

Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh arrived in Cairo on Sunday on a surprise 24-hour visit, and was soon followed by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on his way back home from a European tour. The leaders held a three-way meeting that evening with President Hosni Mubarak, as well as separate bilateral talks with the president. US Under-Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk and Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov are expected to hold separate talks with Mubarak today.

Sunday's tripartite meeting focused on the peace process and the intransigence of the current Israeli government led by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Meeting separately with Arafat, Mubarak was informed of the outcome of last week's visit to the region by US special envoy Dennis Ross. Arafat had earlier said the visit produced "no result". The Palestinian leader also briefed Mubarak on his European tour which aimed to bolster efforts to break the deadlock in the peace process. After nearly one hour of talks, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told reporters that the European Union "was not comfortable" with the current situation in the peace process. "The EU is really concerned," Moussa said. "There is a crisis of confidence in the peace process and severe pessimism, and nothing has happened to change the reasons for this."

The British, French and Luxembourg foreign ministers as well as EU Middle East envoy Miguel Moratinos are expected in Cairo soon.

Saleh's visit followed a telephone conversation on Saturday between the two presidents. In Cairo, he and Mubarak discussed the continuing Yemeni-Eritrean dispute over the Hanish Islands, which has been referred to international arbitration. Eritrean troops occupied the islands which are claimed by Yemen in December 1995. On Monday, Mubarak and Saleh continued their consultations focusing on bilateral cooperation, especially the agenda of the Supreme Joint Committee which will meet on 4 December in Sanaa.

Mubarak also met on Monday with former UN secretary-general and veteran diplomat Boutros Ghali. The president asked Ghali to represent him at a conference of Francophone countries to be held next month in Vietnam. Ghali, with strong French backing, is also Egypt's nominee for the post of secretary-general of a soon-to-be-created Francophone Organisation. His main rival for the post is the former president of Benin, Emile Derlin Zinsou.

The organisation will bring together 49 French-speaking countries, including Egypt, and will be launched at the Hanoi conference in mid-November. Ghali told reporters after his meeting with Mubarak that he hoped to be at the helm of the new organisation, which will work to cement economic and social relations between member-states.

On the same day, Mubarak met with Dan Proper, president of the Israeli Industrial Association, who was in Cairo in the wake of last month's visit by Israeli President Ezer Weizman. According to Israeli embassy spokesman Lior Ben Dor, Mubarak and Weizman had "agreed to encourage cooperation between the two countries' private sectors."

Alluding to next month's fourth Middle East/North Africa economic conference, Proper said he "mentioned the Doha conference" to the president, "but it was not discussed in depth." Proper said he hoped to see Egyptian business executives in the Qatari capital because "every small step towards peace is important." A day earlier, Mubarak had said that Jewish settlement building would have to stop and the Oslo agreement be implemented if Egypt was to attend MENA IV.

Proper said that the Israeli delegation will present a number of regional projects at MENA IV in the fields of tourism, transport, roads and ports. He specifically mentioned a project to build a "common airport" in Aqaba with the Jordanians.

The leading Israeli businessman discussed ways of improving bilateral relations between Egypt and Israel through the private sector. "I am a great believer that the businesspeople can do wonders without any relations to politics," Proper said.

Since Netanyahu came to power, bilateral trade, excluding oil, dropped by 10 per cent in the first nine months of 1997, compared to the same period the previous year, according to embassy figures. Non-oil bilateral trade amounted to $82 million during 1996. Proper, however, insisted that the "Israeli and Egyptian economies are not competing, [but] are complementary".

Peace in a rut

Cairo is discussing ways of salvaging the peace process with its two co-sponsors, but without much hope of an imminent breakthrough. **Dina Ezzat** examines the state of deadlock

As Cairo plays host to two high-ranking US and Russian diplomats, Egyptian officials are voicing concern over the continuing stalemate in Middle East peacemaking, which they blame on the hawkish policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

In meetings this week with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and US assistant-Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk, the Egyptian side will be hoping to hear suggestions as to how the deadlock might be broken. "We welcome all initiatives and efforts," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

Yet the Egyptians do not have much hope that either of the two visitors will come up with the recipe for a breakthrough.

A Foreign Ministry official, pointing out that Indyk had only recently taken up his post, played down the possibility that he might be bringing new ideas or initiatives that the American envoy to the region, Dennis Ross, did not have.

Although the Arabs have described Ross's latest mission in the region last week as a failure, "the American position is that Ross is working on confidence-building on a very complicated issue," the Egyptian official said. "Consequently, the Americans don't see any reason to send a new envoy with new ideas."

As for Primakov, he is touring the region mainly to find ways to bridge the gap between the Syrian and Israeli positions, re-assert the Russian presence in the region and resolve disagreements with Israel on the issue of military cooperation between Russia and Iran.

In meetings with the two visitors, the Egyptians will simply convey their pessimistic assessment of the situation — that valuable time is being wasted and that lack of progress will only aggravate matters further.

"This is an exacerbation of an already volatile situation," said an Egyptian official who asked that his name be withheld. "The negative fallout is not confined to Palestinian-Israeli relations, but is poisoning relations between Israel and all the Arab parties involved in the peace process."

It is no secret that Cairo was dismayed by the negative outcome of the latest flurry of meetings between Israel and the Palestinians. Minister Moussa has repeatedly stated that "smiles and handshakes are not enough."

According to one diplomat, "the way Egypt views the situation is that no concrete results have been achieved, whether regarding Israel's implementation of its interim commitments or a workable set of terms-of-reference for the final status talks."

He added: "We are not telling the parties not to meet; all that we are saying is that nothing concrete is coming out of these meetings."

Egypt also has misgivings as to whether Netanyahu will accept the land-for-peace formula as the basis for the final status negotiations, if and when they open, the diplomat said.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority resumed negotiations a few weeks ago following a visit to the region by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In the presence of Dennis Ross, they discussed a series of confidence-building measures, such as the opening of a harbour and airport in Gaza as well as a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank. But a meeting scheduled to take place in Washington between Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Yasser Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, has been postponed because the former lacked a clear mandate from Netanyahu on Israel's negotiating stance. The talks are to address the thorny issues of Jewish settlements in occupied Arab lands and a second re-deployment in the West Bank.

Mohamed Bassiouni, the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, said that no progress had been made in the talks about opening the airport, harbour and safe passage. The reason, he said, is that Israel insisted on taking full responsibility for the security of these facilities. In other words, the Palestinian Authority cannot operate the airport and harbour because Israel wants to be in charge of security. As for the safe passage, the Netanyahu government claims the right to arrest any Palestinian passing through it merely on suspicion.

Moreover, said Bassiouni, the Likud coalition government wants to delay a second re-deployment in the West Bank, originally scheduled for May 1996, until agreement is reached on final status issues.

The way Bassiouni views the situation is that "for progress to be made, the Palestinians must make concessions."

He added: "The Israelis say that if Egypt stays away, the Palestinians will come around, but Egypt is not and cannot stay away. For us, peace is not just about the recovery of Egyptian territory, but also the solution of the Palestinian problem, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict."

Egyptian officials concede that the stalemate has caused tension in Egyptian-Israeli relations and is a cause of disagreement between Cairo and Washington.

This said, Egyptian officials are well aware of the fact that the current US Congress "is very pro-Israeli" as it has some 30 Jewish votes, and "that is a lot" when it comes to decision-making.

Officials and analysts agree that it is becoming more apparent every day that a breakthrough is unlikely as long as Netanyahu is in power.

This week, Netanyahu made a statement suggesting that the final settlement will follow the Israeli, and not the Arab, vision of peace.

Speaking to reporters, Moussa responded by saying that "it is unrealistic to speak of an Israeli peace". He added that such statements could only play into the hands of ultra-right wing factions.

Commenting on reports that Netanyahu is not going to stick to the agreements signed because he sees them as a threat to Israeli interests, Moussa said: "I don't know what would happen if all [the parties] went back on their commitments under all the UN resolutions relevant to the Palestinian issue — including those related to Israel — [that have been adopted] since 1948."

Asked if it was time to look for an alternative formula, Moussa responded: "There is no alternative to peace, but we are all thinking about what we can do." He added: "Since we have agreed on a certain process, why should we have to find another one?"

Moussa conceded that both Yasser Arafat and the peace process are currently in a "sensitive" situation. To get out of this dilemma, he believes that the "international community should rise to the challenge."

The question is what the international community can do. Palestinian sources say that "although the US may not be too impressed by Netanyahu's policies, they are not going to pressure him when push comes to shove."

Meanwhile the Europeans, who have major trade ties with Israel, have let it be understood that they are not going to put any economic pressure on the Jewish state to soften its policies.

Next month, Egyptian officials will meet with British Foreign Minister Robin Cook, Hubert Vedrine, the French foreign minister, and Jaques Poos, the foreign minister of Luxembourg, which currently holds the presidency of the European Union, for further talks on the ambiguous future of peace-making in the region.

An unexpected trip to Istanbul

Having arrived safely in the port of Istanbul on Monday, the eight Egyptian officials who had been trapped aboard a Turkish ship since last week are now being treated as guests, not prisoners, reports **Dina Ezzat**. After giving evidence at the hearings called by the Turkish authorities in connection with the incident, the eight were expected to fly back to Cairo last night.

The men in question are a court official, two port policemen, two lawyers, two shipping agents and a Suez Canal Authority official. Their ordeal began last Thursday when they found themselves trapped aboard the Turkish freighter Obo Engin.

As he sailed out of the Suez Canal, the captain had refused their orders to return to port to pay off a debt which the ship's owners had incurred with an Egyptian agent. The officials boarded the freighter to bring it back to Port Said, but captain Naci Usakli ignored their demand, saying they had no authority in international waters. He promptly sailed away, taking with him the officials, who had refused to get off.

"The Egyptian citizens are currently staying in a hotel in Istanbul, where they are being well treated. But it was the wish of the Egyptian authorities that they stay there until the necessary interrogations have been carried out by the Turkish side," said Mustafa Abdel-Aziz, assistant to the foreign minister.

He added: "They are in good spirits and have no physical problems. They are constantly accompanied and looked after by Egypt's consul-general in Istanbul [Ibrahim Shaaban], who is there to make sure nothing untoward happens. Once the interrogation is over, they will fly back home."

The ship was travelling from Singapore to Istanbul, where it was to offload 40,000 tons of coal. The ship was asked to turn back on leaving the canal zone because its owners owe $336,000 to an Egyptian agent. However, an AP dispatch from Istanbul quoted the owners, Vakif Deniz Leasing, as saying the debts were incurred by another shipping company, which had leased the freighter previously.

Abdel-Aziz said the issue of the debt "will have to be settled through the appropriate legal channels."

Cairo and Ankara are not bound by any reciprocal conventions as far as their judicial systems are concerned. But according to Abdel-Aziz, the Turkish authorities have been cooperative and no problems are anticipated.

"But obviously," he added, "these matters take time."

Digging northwards

The new secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities says he will give priority to the excavation and restoration of Nile Delta monuments. Gaballah Ali Gaballah spoke to **Nevine El-Aref**



Gaballah

Gaballah Ali Gaballah, until recently dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Archaeology, was appointed last week as secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), where he is to replace Ali Hassan.

In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Gaballah said that his first priority is to shift the focus of the council's activities northwards, to the Nile Delta.

"The Delta is a very important archaeological region, rich with pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic monuments, which are threatened by agricultural expansion and urban growth," he said. "I will give priority to the excavation and restoration of these antiquities and will launch a national campaign to save this heritage. Foreign missions and university teams will be encouraged to excavate and restore the legacy of the Delta."

Another priority will be the restoration of pharaonic sites in the oases of the Western Desert and other remote areas in the Sinai Peninsula, Gaballah said. He will also be encouraging the restoration of Cairo's Coptic and Islamic monuments, which were affected by the October 1992 earthquake and are now in dire need of repair.

A state-of-the-art security system was recently installed at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and Gaballah says he will move fast to provide every museum in Egypt with similar protection. "We will not wait until a theft has been committed," he declared.

He also pledged that "a periodical inspection of antiquities in storage will be carried out and every object will be inventoried and restored." New storage rooms will also be provided where necessary, he added.

Work on the Mit-Rahina Museum will be pushed forward, before the colossus of Ramses II — which now stands in Ramses Square in the heart of Cairo — is moved back to the place where it was originally found, Gaballah said. He will is also keen to see progress with the second phase of the Giza Plateau development project.

The new secretary-general is planning to enlist the assistance of Egyptian expatriate experts in excavation and restoration work, as well as asking them to provide training courses for archaeological inspectors.

Since the 19th century, foreign archaeologists have played an indispensable role in Egypt, "and they can go on working here for 1000 more years," declared Gaballah. "Egyptian antiquities are the heritage of humanity. Neither Egypt nor any other single country can carry out all the work. There is no problem with excavation or restoration work carried out by foreign missions, as long as they respect Egyptian law."

When asked about the antiquities exhibitions that the Egyptian state periodically organises in foreign cities, and which have come under fire in the local press for exposing fragile and precious relics to the perils of long-distance transport, Gaballah came to their defence. In his opinion, these exhibitions are still justified, because they provide "our heritage with good publicity," and the income can be used for the restoration of other monuments.

But the secretary-general remains adamant on another related issue: "Egypt will never stop demanding the recovery of our heritage which was smuggled out of the country and is now on display in certain foreign museums," he vowed.

A break for City kids

Moufid Shehab appears to have softened his position, allowing students of a foreign university branch which he ordered closed to continue their education. **Shaden Shehab** reports

Students enrolled with the Egyptian branch of City University breathed a sigh of relief after Moufid Shehab, minister of higher education and scientific research, decided to allow them to continue their studies at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Martime Transport. Shehab had ordered the branches of City University and Northeastern University to be closed down on 19 October, on the grounds that they were not licensed and were operating illegally. The City University branch had opened in 1992 and the Northeastern only last year.

To obtain a licence, a branch of a foreign university must be sanctioned by a special agreement between the Egyptian government and its home country. Unlike the American University in Cairo (AUC), this condition was not met in the cases of City and Northeastern.

The City University branch operated under the umbrella of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport by virtue of an agreement signed between the two sides. The Academy is an Arab League affiliate.

Although the two branches' premises had been sealed with red wax upon the minister's orders, City University was allowed to reopen on 25 October. The branch occupies one floor of the Arab Academy's premises in the Cairo district of Dokki. Students will be allowed to complete their education by correspondence under the supervision of the Academy's professors, but no new students will be allowed to enrol.

The branch no longer has any formal existence, and a plaque bearing its name has been removed from the Academy's gate.

Shehab described his decision to allow the students to resume their studies as a "humane act". Addressing a news conference on Saturday, he said the decision was taken in coordination with Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid and the Academy's chairman, Gamal Moukhtar. In the same breath, Shehab stressed that "there is no going back on the decision to close down unlicensed education establishments, whatever the consequences."

He said that some of the students enrolled at the two branches did not have a secondary school certificate, whether Egyptian or foreign, which is a prerequisite for any university education. Shehab added that the decision to close down the branches was taken according to cabinet instructions that "no unlicensed educational establishment should be allowed to operate."

As for the Northeastern University, Shehab said that the head of the branch, Faten Leila, had informed him that since they only opened last year, the students would still be able to enrol in Egyptian universities.

Earlier, Leila had vowed that she as well as a number of students would contest the minister's decision before the courts. At the time of going to press, she was not available for comment.

El-Omayed's 'longest day'

The high point of the Bright Star war games was the biggest sea-landing to be staged in the Middle East since Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Galal Nassar was there when the troops came ashore

The sea was calm and the sky was clear when the warships of five nations assembled off Egypt's Northern Coast on Saturday to stage the biggest landing in the Middle East for six years. Troops from Egypt, the United States, Britain, France and Italy came ashore at an area called El-Omayed, west of Alexandria, to defend a "green" state against the aggression of a neighbouring "orange" state. This was the climax of the Bright Star war games which, in addition to these five countries, also *included* Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The landing was described by Maj. Gen. Patrice Multrier, deputy chief of France's Joint Operational Planning Staff, as "the longest day" — an allusion to the day on which the allies landed along the Normandy coastline to liberate occupied France towards the end of War War II.

Under the slogan "Desert warriors side by side," the troops landed *in* six waves along an 800-metre-long, 1,000-metre deep, stretch of coastline. The first to come ashore was a group of Egyptian *Saiqa* special forces, who landed from 12 Zodiac boats. Under a protective umbrella of Egyptian F-4 and F-16 jetfighters, another group of Egyptian mechanised infantry sailed in to land from Czech-made Topaz amphibious craft. The third and fourth waves were American Marines also using amphibious craft, who then took up defensive positions to secure the two flanks of the beachhead.

After a brief lull, the silence was broken by an American hovercraft. It thundered ashore, carrying M-113 personnel carriers, which also took up positions to defend the beachhead. The sixth wave was made up of Egyptian forces who came ashore from British landing platforms.

As the troops began expanding the beachhead, a force of 1,800 American Marines landed and British paratroopers were dropped from the air by Chinook and Black Horse helicopters.

An official English-language document, made available to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, explained the "operational and tactical concept" of the war games. "The general concept of the manoeuvre," the document says, "is summed up in the running of a defensive and an offensive by means of combined troops from Egypt, USA, UK, France, Italy, UAE and Kuwait. They represent the 'green' forces which occupy defensive positions to check and destroy the 'orange' troops and halt their advance on the west. These activities are executed in close cooperation with airborne, seaborne and CAS activities."

The document continues: "As the green troops succeed in checking the advance of the orange troops, an offensive is launched to complete the defeat of the orange forces and to regain the defensive positions as they once had been on the international borderline. The defensive and offensive are run in close cooperation with the major services, the electronic warfare and the airborne special forces which are dropped under severe conditions of air bombardment and possibilities for the use of weapons of mass destruction against them. This concept is based on the notion that *the green country represents our forces [i.e. coalition* forces] and the orange country represents the enemy forces. The combat activities are based on 'free play' techniques with partial restriction on the movements of the orange troops to achieve the training objectives."

Maj. Gen. Galal Abbas, chief of the training authority of the Egyptian armed forces, told the *Weekly* that this year's war games were the biggest ever. The number of participating countries has risen to seven, compared to five in the 1995 Bright Star exercise. Kuwait and Italy are taking part for the first time. Moreover, 22 countries have sent observers.

Abbas said the exercise aims at raising the combat efficiency of the participating forces, both tactically and strategically, through experience in the use of the full range of air, sea and land weapons. The exercise also includes rescue and peace-keeping operations, he added.

After Saturday's successful landing, mock battles began on Sunday between the "orange" and "green" forces in a theatre of operations that is 1,000kms long and 50kms deep. At first, the "orange" forces succeeded in penetrating the defences of the "green" state which responded by pinning down and encircling the invaders and then striking at their flanks to gain time while the forces of the coalition were assembled.

In a fierce "air battle" that included 267 sorties, F-16, Mirage 2000, MIG-21 and F-4 warplanes carried out night bombardments and struck at reinforcements.

Sunday's training included an "emergency" situation in which the coalition forces face the possibility of an air strike in which chemical weapons might be used against them. The training also included the detection of batteries of surface-to-surface missiles.

On Monday, the Western Desert was the scene of the biggest mock battle since World War II. Coalition warplanes first raided the airports and air bases of the "orange" state and then a group of special forces attacked "enemy" lines to open the way for the principal offensive by the bulk of the coalition forces. They destroyed the "orange" armour as well as reinforcements that were rushed to the scene of battle. As a result of the "orange" state's failure to stage a counter-offensive, the "green" forces advanced to destroy a large number of "enemy" troops and capture vital targets before they reached the international boundary.

The war games will enter their final phase on Saturday with an exercise for the Egyptian and American division, brigade and regiment commanders. The training will involve air attacks against command centres and armour, the use of air defence methods against attacking warplanes and securing the international borderline. Offensive and defensive decisions are taken by the lower and middle-level commanders and then assessed by their superiors to see what lessons can be drawn from them.

According to a military operations source, this phase is the most important because it provides the commanders with "really useful" training in making a quick assessment of the situation and taking the appropriate decision. The commanders are also provided with training in cooperation to achieve joint objectives, the source said.

According to Maj. Gen. Multrier, French troops are *taking part in the war games in particular so as to gain* experience of desert warfare. "Another objective is to take part in a multi-national force, with the aim of unifying concepts, and preparing for the possibility of joint action in future operations," he said.

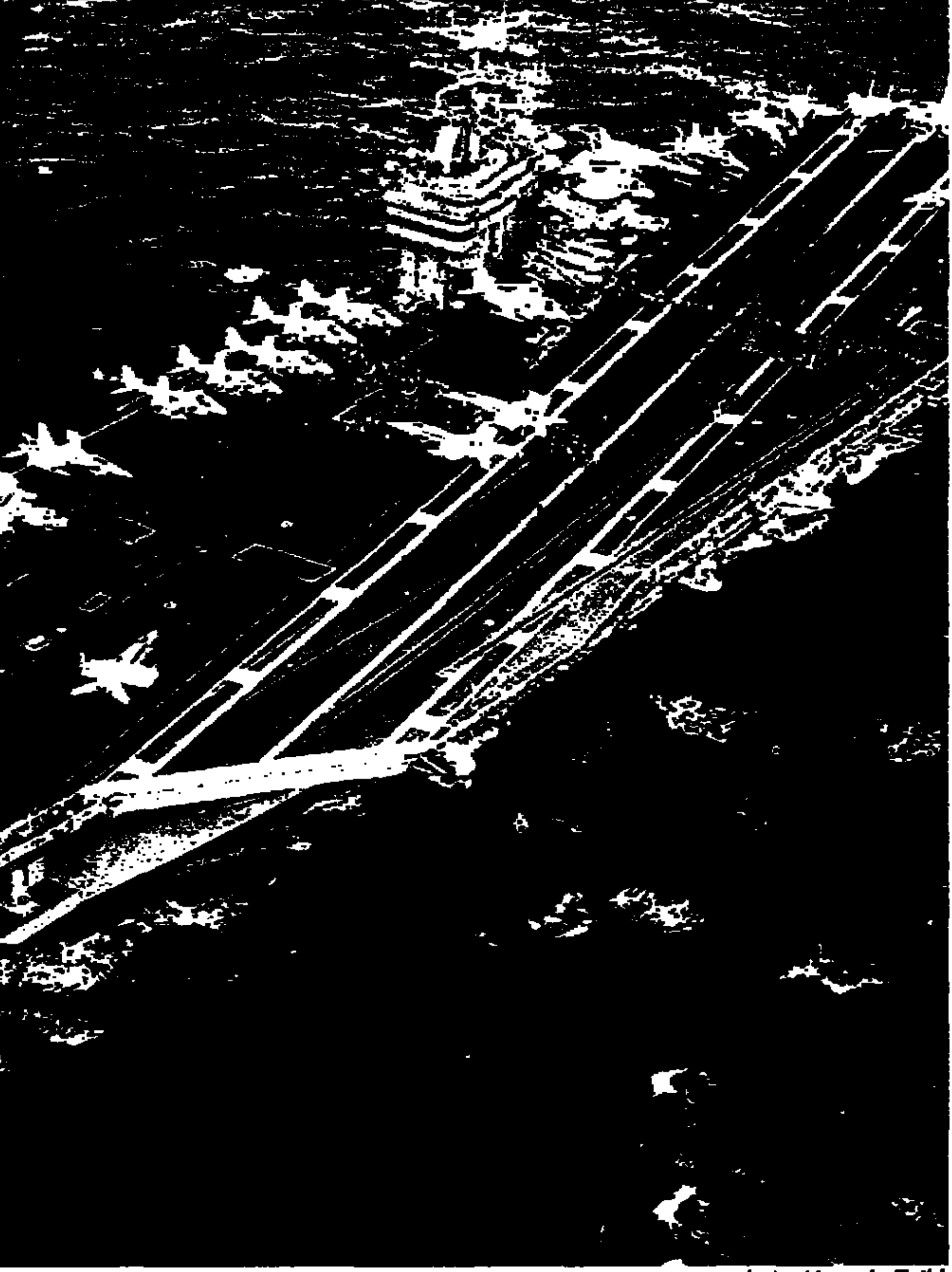
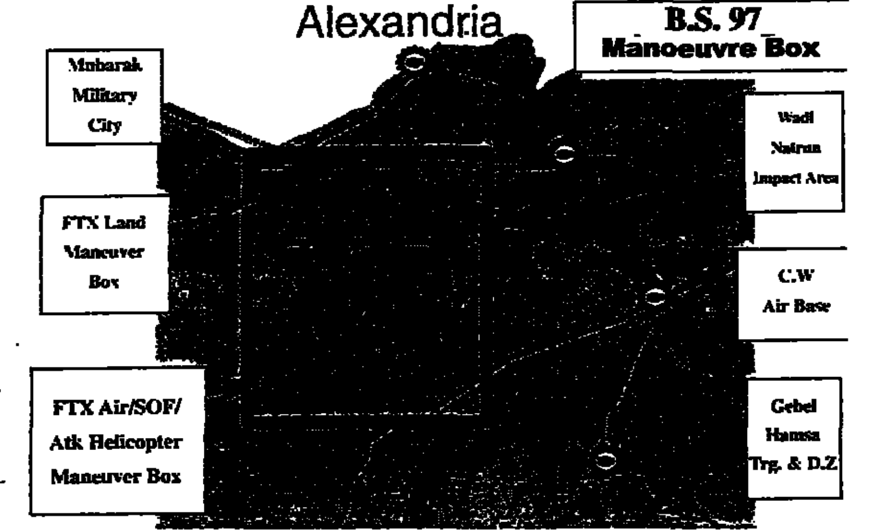


photo: Hussein Fathi



The American nuclear-powered aircraft carrier George Washington (above); a map of the theatre of operations (right)

'Expat' newspapers under fire

While the Higher Press Council strives to bring under its jurisdiction newspapers which, though published in Egypt, have foreign licences, 41 of these publications have been suspended on a legal technicality. Gihan Shahine reports

The Higher Press Council, in an announcement last week, said it was considering the application of the 1996 Press Law to newspapers which are published and distributed in Egypt on the authority of foreign licences. Mustafa Kamal Helmi, the Council's chairman, said some restrictions should be imposed on these publications, many of which were criticised for the sensationalist nature of their reporting. He also said the Council will *examine* the status of these newspapers, including their budgets and financing. The Council's objective, he added, is "to maintain the high standards of the Egyptian press".

Although the two developments would appear to be unrelated, the Council's statement was quickly followed by a decision by the Information Ministry to suspend the publication of 41 foreign-licensed newspapers, many of them relatively little-known and with limited circulation. The reason, according to Lutfi Abdel-Kader, chief of the ministry's publications and press department, is that these newspapers have violated the law by not printing in a free trade zone so as to avoid the payment of customs fees. These newspapers will be allowed to re-appear once they comply with the regulations, he said.

Legal sources were sceptical, however, as to whether a local press law can legitimately be applied to publications which are technically classified as foreign. Many publishers acquire *foreign licences, not out of devious or* seditious intent, but simply because a local licence is not forthcoming. According to the 1996 law, newspapers other than the national and party press can only be published by a public company which has at least 10 shareholders. The capital of a newspaper should be no less than LE250,000 for a weekly and LE1 million for a daily. All the members of the editorial board should also be members of the Press Syndicate.

"These conditions are difficult to meet and the Higher Press Council rarely approves a request for a licence," said Sayed Abu Zeid, the Press Syndicate's lawyer. As a way out, publishers acquire a foreign licence, usually Cypriot or British, and then obtain the Information Ministry's permission to print and distribute locally, he added.

Abu Zeid argued that the local press law cannot be applied to these publications — or if it is, then it should also be applied to publications which really are foreign, such as *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. But if the Higher Press Council seriously wants to bring those publications too under its jurisdiction, then *either* the Press Law should be modified or the Information Ministry should be persuaded to revoke their printing and distribution *permits*, he said.

The Council's statement drew mixed reactions. Many journalists who are keen to improve standards in the profession saw it as good news. But others expressed fears that it might further muzzle freedom of expression.

"Regardless of the quality of these publications, I believe that we need *more independent* newspapers *that* are not aligned with a given political or religious faction," Abu Zeid said. "People have the right to express themselves and it is up to the reader to take it or leave it."

But veteran writers Lutfi El-Kholi and Salah Montasser disagreed.

"These publications are scandalous," El-Kholi said. "Many of them blackmail businessmen and have turned their pages into an arena in which the rivalries between different businessmen and companies are fought out. The Higher Press Council should stop this farce."

Montasser said: "Unfortunately, most of these publications are not up *to standard* and many of them are involved in unethical practices. They tend to be sensationalist in order to achieve a higher circulation."

But their publishers say that if they are doing brisk business, it is because they have a liberal and unbiased approach to news, something of which Egyptian society is badly in need. "There are no criteria for quality," said Ibrahim Issa, editor-in-chief of the weekly *Al-Destour*, which has a Cypriot licence. "Whether a newspaper presents quality news or not should be left to the reader to decide. In the normal course of things, bad quality newspapers will die out without any interference from the government."

Al-Destour's publishers had applied repeatedly for a local licence, but were turned down. "Next time, we will go to court," Issa vowed.

Saad Hagras, managing editor of the British-licensed *Al-Aalam Al-Yom* newspaper, maintains that any newspaper, even national ones, may go wrong. "The Higher Press Council should single out specific culprits, instead of targeting the foreign-licensed publications as a group," he said. "I believe that independent newspapers have come to fill an important gap in the market. The country needs more specialised newspapers which publish material that is *different from* that provided by national and political party publications."

Bus assailants to be sentenced today

A military court will today hand down its verdict against the two brothers accused of bombing a tourist bus. Shaden Shehab reports

Two brothers, Saber and Mahmoud Farahat, who pleaded guilty to charges of *killing nine* Germans and an Egyptian in a firebomb attack against a tourist bus, will be sentenced today by the Supreme Military Court. The fate of seven other men, charged with providing them with weapons and teaching them how to make primitive fire-bombs, will also be decided by the court. The seven had pleaded innocent. In his testimony to the court, Mahmoud Farahat had *exonerated* five of them.

The two Farahat brothers, who were arrested at the scene of the crime in Tahrir Square, face the death penalty. The charges against the seven others are punishable by a maximum sentence of life imprisonment with hard labour.

The verdicts will be handed down 16 days after the opening of the trial on *14* October and six weeks after the 18 September attack on the tourist bus outside the Egyptian Museum.

In the second session of the trial, Saber, 32, and Mahmoud, 24, pleaded guilty to the charges of premeditated murder, attacking tourists and damaging the economy through violence and terrorism.

The military prosecutor demanded the maximum penalty for all nine defendants. "The two brothers wanted to hurt the tourist industry, and I demand an exemplary penalty against them to dissuade all those who may be tempted to try and damage tourism or the Egyptian economy," he said during the third session of the trial.

Immediately after the attack, authorities had described Saber as mentally deranged, but the prosecutor said that "a medical report proved that he is responsible for his actions and is not mentally ill."

The two brothers had said they attacked the bus to defend Islam. Saber said he believed in the ideology of the *militant Jihad group, which was* responsible for assassinating President Anwar El-Sadat in 1981, although he was not one of its members.

During the fourth session of the trial on Saturday, the court listened to the presentations of the defendants' lawyers. Saber's lawyer, Osama Saad, began by saying that his task was a difficult one since Saber has refused to talk to him, was arrested at the scene of the crime, and has pleaded guilty. He therefore did not defend Saber specifically, but talked rather in general terms about who was to blame for the ideas which had influenced Saber's actions.

"We all have to ask the question: who is the real killer?" Saad said. "Yes, we all know that the actual killer is Saber, but who *is* really responsible?"

Saad went on: "My client acted after he became convinced by his readings [of Islamist works] that the new world order, following the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union, was against Islam and had declared war against Muslims. Saber felt that as a Muslim, he must rush into battle to *defend Islam.*"

Saad also pointed an accusing finger at moderate theologians. "Extremist works have been published for the past 20 years, but no religious official has attempted to answer them. Saber would not have been able to find a single book refuting the [extremist] ideology contained in the works that he read," Saad said.

He also criticised Egyptian Television for focusing on entertainment and "devoting a limited time only to religious programmes." "We have to reform our society if we do not want to have another Saber tomorrow," Saad warned.

The presentation by Mahmoud's lawyer, Fathi El-Temsah, was along the *same* lines. He said that "five years ago, Saber was inspired by the massacres of Bosnian Muslims. This year, he decided to take revenge because the Israeli woman who plastered posters insulting the Prophet Mohamed around Hebron was not punished." The lawyer said that "Saber and Mahmoud set off a bomb which has exploded in the face of international barbarism."

The lawyers of the seven other defendants asked the court to acquit their clients. Some of the seven had earlier told the court their confessions were extracted from them under brutal treatment by the police. Mahmoud said that only two defendants, Ahmed El-Guindi and Habib Iskandar, had provided him with weapons. He said he made false accusations against the five others because he wanted to avenge himself upon them for different reasons.

Saber said he did not regret killing the Germans, but wished they had been Jews.

On 27 October 1993, Saber opened fire on a group of foreigners inside the coffee-shop of the Semiramis Hotel. Two Frenchmen and an American were killed and another American, a Syrian and an Italian were wounded.

Saber was not put on trial at the time because an examination by psychiatrists at the government-run Abbassiya Mental Hospital, under the supervision of hospital director Dr Sayed El-Qott, diagnosed him as schizophrenic. Saber later said that he bribed El-Qott *to get himself* certified as mentally ill. He was confined to El-Khanka Mental Hospital as of 27 January 1994.

The investigation into the bus attack has revealed that Saber used to bribe doctors and nurses to allow him to leave and return to the hospital at will.

Lawyer pursues biblical debt

An Egyptian lawyer plans to teach the Israeli government a history lesson, by suing for the restitution of gold and silver their ancestors borrowed from the Egyptians more than 3,000 years ago. Mona El-Nahhas turns over the evidence

Lawyer Nabil Helmi is borrowing a leaf out of Israel's book of tricks. He is planning to file a lawsuit against the Israeli government demanding the repayment of a 3,300-year-old debt. According to the Bible, the ancient Israelites, on the eve of their exodus from Egypt, borrowed from their Egyptian hosts quantities of "jewels of silver, jewels of gold, and raiment," which *appear never to* have been returned. Helmi feels the government of the modern Hebrew state should make good the debt — plus accumulated interest.

Legal experts are confident that Helmi's chances are nil. Helmi himself is aware that the lawsuit, in all probability, will be thrown out by the Egyptian courts. But he believes the case has more than just *symbolic value*.

"The Israelis appeal to the Old Testament in laying claim to the ownership of Palestine, describing it as the Promised Land," Helmi, a law professor at Zagazig University, said. "So, we are appealing to the same source to prove our long-lost rights. If the court quashes our lawsuit on the grounds that verses in the Bible cannot stand as legal documents, then the same principle should apply to the question of the Promised Land, *and Israel's* "allegations" will have been refuted."

The idea of suing the Israeli government for the stolen gold and silver was the brainchild of the Egyptian community in Switzerland. Community members floated the plan when the Israeli government laid claim to the money which the victims of the Holocaust had deposited in Swiss banks more than 50 years ago. "It is strange indeed for the state of Israel to pose as the heir of the Jews killed in the Holocaust," Helmi said.

Gamil Yakan, deputy chairman of the Egyptian Community in Switzerland, gathered the necessary data and agreed with Helmi to take legal action. "We have not yet decided whether to file the lawsuit in Egypt or Switzerland. The case needs additional preparation," Helmi said.

Helmi cited verses from the Book of Exodus to back up his position. Verses 21 and 22 of chapter three say: "And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians."

Verse two of chapter 11 carries the same message. "Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold."

Verses 35 and 36 of Chapter 12 confirm that the ancient Israelites did indeed do as they were advised. "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses, and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them *such things as they required*: and they spoiled the Egyptians."

Helmi said the verses "provide ample proof of the robbery which the ancient Israelites committed, the biggest robbery in history." Adding on compound annual interest at five per cent, Helmi estimated the current value of the debt owed to the Egyptians at nine million tons of gold, though he did not explain how he arrived at this precise figure. Although he conceded that the Bible did not mention the exact amount of the stolen jewelery, he claimed that the details could be found in various books on Biblical history and exegesis.

Helmi argued that the Egyptian right to the stolen jewelery could not be lost by limitations, that is, on the grounds that all this happened a very long time ago. "This is a historical case, and Egyptian rights cannot be forfeited," he said.

Not so, responded Ahmed Abul-Wafa, a law professor at Cairo University. "The lawsuit has no chance whatsoever of getting anywhere, mainly because 3,000 years are long enough for any legal rights to become null and void," he said.

Moreover, even if the court ruled in Helmi's favour, Abul-Wafa added, its decision could not be implemented. "Egyptian courts have no jurisdiction in Israel, and Israel will certainly refrain from complying," he said. "We should not expect that a state which violates the UN Security Council's resolutions and other international agreements to respect the judgement of an Egyptian court."

And Helmi cannot file the lawsuit with the International Court of Justice, Abul-Wafa said, "as this can only be done by the executive authority, which is the Egyptian government, and not by individuals."

Ahmed Rifaat, another law professor, agreed with Abul-Wafa that any rights claimed by Helmi were lost by limitations. Moreover, he said, the Bible does not mention the exact amount or value of the stolen jewelery. "So, how can we ask the Israeli government to repay a debt whose value is unknown?" he asked.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos



Members of the Israeli peace group Dor Shalem — who also belong to the Israeli army reserve — hold signs outside the Tel Aviv Rabbinate reading "we are Jewish enough to die in Lebanon", a reference to Netanyahu's comment that Israeli left-wingers "have forgotten what it is like to be Jewish" (photo: Reuters)

The return of the tribes

Arafat needs to do much more than oust an unpopular bureaucrat, if only he would read the writing on the wall of the Rafah governor's gutted residence. Graham Usher writes from the Gaza Strip's border city

The governor's house in Rafah on the southern tip of the Gaza Strip used to be a gleaming white, three-storied apartment block on the edge of the town's main square. No longer. Today the house is a gutted shell, its vacant window frames smeared with soot and its ground-floor garages protected by armed, khaki-clad Palestinian soldiers.

The destruction is the result of a chain of events in Rafah which, last week, saw thousands of Palestinians storm the governor's residence in violent protest over the way they are governed. But it is also emblematic of all that is wrong with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority (PA) in the areas it commands and, perhaps, of what is in store should political reforms (as much as economic prosperity) not be forthcoming.

Palestinians say the trouble started in "a fight over money" between two of Rafah's biggest clans, the Al-Dhair and Abu Samhadanah families. It should have been resolved between them or by the legal system of the Palestinian Authority (PA). But, in Rafah, divisions between civil and political authority are not so neat, which is why a spat over money can — in the words of one Palestinian from Rafah — "become a tribal war in which one of the tribes is the PA."

The Abu Samhadanahs are not simply a large Bedouin tribe in Rafah; they are a major political force within the PA's southern Gaza Governorate, responsible for the welfare of some 120,000 Palestinians, most of them refugees.

Last year, Yasser Arafat appointed Abdallah Abu Samhandanah Rafah's Governor. It was not a popular choice. In January 1996, Abdallah had stood for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) but failed to muster enough votes to be elected. His appointment as governor — an entirely new position in Gaza, without historical precedent — was widely seen to be due to the weight of his family and their loyalty to Arafat rather than as representing any mandate from the people. Abdallah certainly seemed to see it this way.

Within months of his appointment, Abdallah's brother, Odeh, was made chief of the Political Department in the PA's Interior Ministry. Another brother, Suliman, was put in charge of the PA's Electricity Company for Gaza's southern area. All three lived on separate floors in the governor's house, guarded by assorted police and intelligence forces whose heads are various Abu Samhandanah "cousins". The dispensation of power and position in Rafah thus became a matter of family connections rather than any other criteria.

And so, it appeared, was the administration of justice. To settle his quarrel with the Al-Dhairs, Abdallah last month arrived at the latter's house escorted by a bevy of heavily armed policemen. Unable to enter the house, the police opened fire, severely wounding Musa Al-Dhair, the clan's *muktar*. The Al-Dhair family placed a notice in Palestine's main *Al-Quds* newspaper, calling on the "masses and the governing authority ... not to permit the law of the jungle to rule our nation". The call went unheeded — until 22 October, when Musa Al-Dhair died from his wounds.

Following his funeral the next day, around 2,000 Palestinians marched on the governor's house. The march was led by the Al-Dhair family but supported by others, including Palestinians from Rafah's Shabura refugee camp, whose poverty stands in provocative contrast to the house's opulence. "It was neither a demonstration against the PA nor simply a clan dispute", said one Palestinian. "It was a cocktail of both."

The cocktail ignited. In a street battle lasting seven hours, Palestinians threw rocks and molotov cocktails, torching the governor's residence and two more houses belonging to Yasser and Tayssir Samhadanah, both officers in the Palestinian police. In a desperate attempt to maintain order, the police opened fire with live ammunition, killing one Palestinian and wounding four others.

The slain Palestinian was Mohamed Al-Shaar, whose family had its own run-in with the Abu Sanhandanahs two years before, losing a 15 year old member in that 'tribal' fight. Rafah collectively held its breath, fearing that the Al-Shaar funeral the next day would be incendiary. The apprehension was shared by the PA. At the height of the clashes on 23 October, the Palestinian police sealed off Rafah, arrested several journalists and destroyed all film of the events.

Yet the funeral passed off peacefully, despite an estimated attendance of 5,000. In the interim, Rafah's PLC members had intervened to cool tempers, while Arafat (telephoning from Paris) allegedly promised the Al-Dhair family that Abdallah would soon be "removed" from his post. Palestinians from Shabura say this is the very least the PA can do to make amends. "Abdallah has zero support in Rafah. He must go," said one. But other Palestinians see Arafat's solution (if it is so) as part of the problem.

Since the PA was installed in 1994, Arafat has based his rule on two crucial constituencies. One was his Fatah movement, many of whose cadres were absorbed into the PA's burgeoning and often lawless security forces. But the other was Arafat's deliberate reempowerment of Palestine's traditional or tribal families, like the Abu Samhadanahs or, for that matter, the Al-Dheirs. In Rafah, the two constituencies have become one, with tribal and political loyalties so interwoven as to be inseparable.

For Palestinian analysts like the sociologist, Islah Jad, the PA's "revival of tribal structures" is not only inimical to Palestinian hopes for a law based and democratic society. It is corrosive of the modern national consciousness Palestinians have forged out of their conflict with Israel. For 30 years, says Jad, "the national movement conducted a long struggle to weaken loyalty to the family and the tribe and strengthen the concept of nationalism and loyalty to the homeland. Any rebuilding of tribal structures will reinstate the family and the tribe as the individual's first loyalty."

Many Palestinians in Rafah agree. "During the Intifada, people forgot about the tribes," commented a Palestinian from Shabura. "Resident or refugee, Christian or Muslim, we were one people. But now the tribes are back."

Side-stepping Hizbullah?

Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri's path breaking visit to Tehran may have Hizbullah worried, reports Zeina Khodr from Beirut

Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri is the first Lebanese head of government to visit Iran in 23 years. While the visit's declared aim is to forge greater economic and trade links between the two countries, observers here have attributed greater weight to the visit's political and ideological implications. Analysts have started to probe the visit's impact on the Hizbullah resistance movement which receives backing from Iran. Hizbullah has, thus far refrained from commenting on the trip.

"I hope to boost relations between the two governments based on mutual respect, as well as expand bilateral economic ties," Hariri told reporters upon arrival in Tehran.

"Mutual respect means Iran will seek to establish a direct relationship with Lebanon and not a relation by proxy," Nizar Hamze, chairman of the political science department at the American University of Beirut (AUB) told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "This means Hariri and the Lebanese government want Iranian relations to be directly with Lebanon and not via Hizbullah."

Previously, relations between the Iranian government and the Lebanese government have been tense because of Tehran's insistence on backing Hizbullah directly. Tensions came to a head last year when the Lebanese president, Elias El-Hrawi, expressed anger over Tehran channeling funds to help rebuild homes and villages in south Lebanon — destroyed by Israeli bombing — via Hizbullah.

"This trip is an important breakthrough in relations," the Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Hamayon Ali Zadah said. The visit signifies an easing of tension between the two countries. "Iran supports Lebanon's independence and territorial integrity and helps Lebanon defend itself against the Zionist enemy."

Statements made by Iranian officials, stressing that the Islamic Republic should respect Lebanon's sovereignty, also indicate that they want to build a new relationship with Beirut.

AUB's Hamze comments that "The timing of the visit has coincided with Mohamed Khatami's recent presidential election victory. He is regarded as a moderate and Hariri probably thought this would be the best opportunity." He added: "Khatami's policy is one of rapprochement. He is pursuing policies of establishing direct ties with Arab and Islamic nations including Lebanon."

A major point of disagreement between Tehran and Beirut is over the Middle East peace process. Lebanon is committed to the process but on the basis of UN resolutions which call for exchanging land for peace. Iran, for its part, believes Israel has no right to exist and condemns the peace process as a sellout of Palestinian rights. While Tehran is not a party to regional peace negotiations, it plays an important role in the light of its support to Hizbullah. Hizbullah spearheaded guerrilla attacks against Israeli occupying forces in southern Lebanon. Iran officially denies providing anything other than humanitarian aid to the movement.

Hariri during his meeting with Khatami

Hariri and Hizbullah are also at odds over a number of local issues. Hizbullah has consistently opposed the government's economic policies and at times questioned the prime minister's support to the resistance. But recent months have witnessed a rapprochement between the two sides. Hizbullah, in short, has become less critical of the Lebanese government.

"The prevailing situation in Iran is directly reflected in the Hizbullah leadership and thus, has to adapt itself to any changes in the leadership in Iran," Hamze explained. "Sheikh Subhi Tufeyli, the former head of Hizbullah (who has launched a civil disobedience campaign against the Lebanese government in the Bekaa area) is backed by militant leaders in Iran. Sheikh Mohamed Hussein Fadlallah who is the spiritual leader of Hizbullah, supports Khatami's policy of rapprochement while Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hizbullah who enjoys mass support in Lebanon, is an ally of Ali Khamenei."

Nasrallah was in Iran a week before Hariri's scheduled visit. During his visit, Nasrallah told a gathering of supporters that he would be announcing a more lenient recruiting policy that will give all those wishing to join the resistance, the right to do so. "Hizbullah intends to be more open in allowing people to join the resistance, regardless of religion or political affiliation." This was interpreted as a sign that Nasrallah needs to come up with new tactics to deal with the balance of power and to appease the right people in Iran. Hamze argues that this position is a reflection of Khatami's view that "the resistance should not be one colour."

Hariri, who was accompanied by a high ranking political and economic delegation, signed several accords in areas including finance, trade, transport and the avoidance of double taxation.

Hariri had called for greater cooperation with Tehran in various economic spheres and for joint investment in oil and transportation sectors. During talks, Iranian officials raised the issue of the return of direct Iranian scheduled flights to Beirut International Airport and Hariri reportedly pledged to refer the matter to the Transport Ministry and Middle East Airlines, Lebanon's national carrier.

Hariri also raised the issue of purchasing discounted petroleum from Iran and linked closer bilateral cooperation to Iran's modifying its ban on importing a range of goods.

Hariri held talks with high ranking officials in Iran including President Mohamed Khatami, spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenie and former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

The south Lebanon issue was also high on the agenda of talks with Iranian officials supporting Lebanon's struggle. "By defending itself against Israeli aggression Lebanon is acting on behalf of all Arab and Muslim countries," Khatami said. "We believe in Lebanon's capacity to achieve great things which is shown by its fight to free the south which has united all the Lebanese."

Hariri's historic trip to Tehran is destined to create reverberations in Lebanon. This new Iranian policy of rapprochement which is being vigorously pursued by Khatami will change the relationship between Beirut and Tehran. But analysts are still waiting to see how much it will affect Hizbullah's internal influence.

Baker blames bombs and bulldozers

The Clinton administration has backtracked on the unequivocal US position that Jewish settlements in occupied Palestinian territories were illegal and a violation of the land-for-peace principle, former US Secretary of State James Baker tells Atef El-Ghamri in an interview in Houston

James Baker — secretary of state under the Bush administration — was never the quiet, retiring type. He had — and still has — his own strong opinions on how things should be done. When former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir reneged on commitments he had made as part of the Middle East peace process, Baker boldly informed a Congressional committee: "Shamir knows my number [at the State Department] and if he needs me he can reach me there."

As secretary of state, he played a central role in the establishment of the framework within which current peace process initiatives are continuing to take place. His contribution was vital in helping to convene the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid in 1991. The former US Secretary now runs the Baker Institute for Public Policy, a leading US centre for public policy.

In a recent conference on the Middle East at Rice University, you strongly criticisied Israeli settlements. Your words concerning the settlements and the peace process were clear, frank, and unequivocal. Can you explain to us your view on this issue?

I was clear in criticising the Clinton administration's stand regarding the settlements and the use of the veto power in the Security Council against a resolution condemning the settlement developments.

Our position was clear during the Bush administration. We maintained that the settlements were illegal and an obstacle to peace. The Clinton administration, however, sees the settlements merely as a complicating factor in the peace process. This position contradicts the land for peace formula established by Oslo and forces new realities on the ground. As a result, the parties are unable to negotiate on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

The Bush administration was very clear in opposing the settlements and President Bush was brave in refusing Yitzhak Shamir's request for the $10 billion in housing loan guarantees — in addition to the $3 billion which Israel already receives every year from the United States. President Bush made it clear to [former Israeli Prime Minister] Yitzhak Shamir that he had to freeze the construction of the settlements on disputed territory. Shamir was counting on Congress [to approve the housing loan guarantees], but this did not happen. Eventually, he changed his position and the construction of the settlements was halted.

The current peace process was begun in Madrid and has continued through the Oslo agreements. The current US administration did not have any problem with this peace process until Netanyahu, who held very different views to Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, came to power. In dealing with the hard-line Netanyahu government, the Clinton administration needs to be forceful in presenting its initiatives.

The US is no longer at the negotiating table facilitating the peace process; rather, we fulfil the role of the honest broker. However, as the last remaining superpower, the US play an active role in the negotiating process.

What is your evaluation of the role played by the recently appointed Secretary of State Madeleine Albright? What is your view of her approach to the peace process, which is based on the argument that in reaching agreements only the parties themselves should be involved?

Generally speaking, the parties involved in any set of negotiations are the ones who must ultimately make the difficult decisions. In the case of the current process, the US cannot impose peace on the parties. However, when the parties undertake actions that may diminish any chance for peace, then the US must play a more assertive role.

Here, I am speaking of terrorism and also of the intimidating actions such as settlement building, house demolitions, and West Bank closures. I would like to make it clear that it is my belief that there is no comparison whatsoever between killing people — through suicide bombs — and building settlements. The Palestinians need to understand that each time a bomb explodes in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv it does not weaken Netanyahu. On the contrary, it strengthens his position.

During the Cold War, Israel played a central role in the Western strategy vis-à-vis the "Soviet threat", through its special relationship with the US. This situation no longer exists. What remains of this special relationship, or has the "New World Order" required a change in the relationship?

The US has strategic interests in its alliance with Israel. There are also strong cultural ties. The US is committed to the security of Israel to such an extent that if the security of Israel is threatened, the US will come to its aid. This situation has not been affected by the changes in global relations.

On the other hand, the US has many other interests in the Middle East. Such interests are not always consistent with Israel's interests. However, our overriding interest is in helping to establish peace in the Middle East.

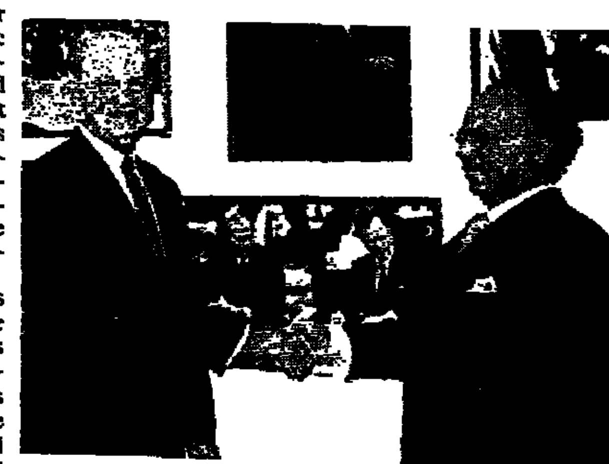
Before "the historic handshake" between Arafat and Rabin, you had stated that a face-to-face meeting between the two leaders was essential to the progress of the peace process. What obstacles remain? What other issues could potentially derail the peace process?

The one thing that is currently threatening to derail the peace process is the clear lack of trust which exists on both sides. When the Rabin government began dealing with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation — a body that until then had been considered a terrorist organisation — we witnessed a level of trust that permitted some rather remarkable progress.

That trust has now been destroyed by actions on both sides. The truth of the matter is that we cannot abide to either the bomb or the bulldozer if we are going to progress to a comprehensive peace settlement. There is, of course, no excuse for terrorist actions, just as there is no excuse for creating facts on the ground through the settlement of land which is supposed to be the subject of negotiations.

Israel obviously maintains that the disputed areas are part of its territory, and that it therefore has the right to continue building settlements and destroying Palestinian houses. What sort of constraints can, or should, the international community impose on Israel in that regard?

The policy of the United States, under both Democratic and Republican administrations — and the policy of almost all other countries — is that the establishment of settlements on disputed land is, at the very least, an obstacle to peace.



Atef El-Ghamri with James Baker in Houston

Indeed, that has been the view of the US at various stages of the peace process. Such activities negate the substance of [Security Council Resolutions] 242 and 338 — resolutions which state that the future of that territory is to be determined by negotiation.

If the peace process breaks down, or if the negotiations stall again, do you think the process has enough momentum to eventually get itself going again? Will a breakdown be more than temporary?

We know that in the Middle East whenever there is no progress towards peace, sadly there is violence. That is a truism, and yet the process has survived some fairly significant bumps in the road before.

My view is that it will survive bumps in the future. It may have to await the emergence of a government in Israel that is committed to peace or, conceivably, it could take place if Netanyahu decides that the hard-liners in his government are a hindrance to peace and enters into a coalition arrangement with the Labour Party.

The real test though, lies in determining whether Netanyahu wants to be remembered as the prime minister who brought Israel peace with its Arab neighbours, or as the prime minister who killed the peace process.

My own view is that he wants peace. He is no Shimon Peres — not by any stretch of the imagination — nor is he a Yitzhak Rabin. But on the other hand he is not a Yitzhak Shamir either.

Netanyahu lies somewhere in between, and as he begins to realise that three-quarters of Israelis genuinely want peace, I believe he will try to move the peace process forward.

Final poll, but what about the violence?

Algeria's pro-government party, the RND, won the majority of seats in last week's municipal elections. But with all other parties claiming wide scale electoral fraud, can the latest poll bring the embattled nation closer to peace? **Amira Howeidy** writes

In what the government dubbed a "historic" day, Algerians last Thursday cast their votes in municipal council elections which concluded President Lamine Zeroual's effort to create democratic legitimacy for his government.

Despite the violence in the lead-up to the poll, there were no reported incidents of violence on election day. According to official figures released on Saturday, 67 per cent of Algeria's 16 million registered voters participated in the election. The pro-government National Democratic Rally (RND), with 7,242 municipal council seats — more than half of those contested — and 686 regional seats, claimed victory in the elections. The former ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), won 2,864 municipal and 373 regional seats, with the Islamist Movement for a Peaceful Society (MPS) — formerly know as Hamas — winning 890 municipal and 260 regional seats.

"The results were expected, with the polling process merely a formality," Salima Ghezali, editor-in-chief of the French-language Algerian newspaper *La Nation*, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The results are almost identical to those polled in the legislative elections held in June," she said. "They are rigged, lack transparency and will not, therefore, put an end to the crisis."

This year's elections are Algeria's first since the annulment of the 1992 legislative elections at which the now outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) looked set to win. The FIS scored a landslide victory in local elections in the months prior to this. In protest at the annulment of the legislative election results, the FIS, along with a number of other Islamist groups, resorted to a campaign of anti-government violence. More than 80,000 people have been killed as a result of this violence.

Since being appointed in 1994 by Algeria's military-dominated ruling council, President Zeroual has sought to bestow legitimacy upon his government. After amending the country's constitution and barring militant Islamist groups from taking part in the political process, presidential elections were held in November 1995. Zeroual, virtually uncontested for the top job, was victorious. At the legislative elections held in June this year, the RND won an overwhelming majority of seats.

Algerian government officials believe that this year's round of elections will revamp the country's political structure and formally legitimise Zeroual's position. "The elections are an important step towards rebuilding Algeria's political institutions," a smiling Zeroual told reporters as he cast his vote.

But socialist, liberal and Islamist parties accused the government of inflating turnout figures and interfering with the final results. The FLN has demanded a "correction of the announced results", and called on the government to prosecute "commanders of this serious political plot."

Mahfouz Nehnah, head of the MPS accused elements within the government of employing "dubious measures" to manipulate the outcome of Thursday's vote. While Said Saadi, leader of the secularist Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) called on Zeroual to annul the election results.

The FIS, which had earlier called for a boycott of the elections, issued a statement from its bureau in Bonn, Germany, denouncing what it called "unprecedented electoral manipulation" by the Algerian government. The statement also called for a "comprehensive and just" political solution to a dispute this most recent round of elections has apparently left unresolved.

The most direct challenge to last Thursday's municipal council elections, however, came from Hussein Ayat Ahmed's Front for Socialist Forces (FFS). On Monday the FFS led a massive rally through the streets of Algiers, protesting the "widespread electoral fraud". "Thousands of Algerians, together with key figures from the FLN, MPS, RCD and Al-Nahda, responded to our call and filled the streets of Algiers," FFS spokesman Samir Bou'ekwier told the *Weekly* in a telephone interview from Algiers. "We were all there to speak out against the manipulation of the election results." "Ballot-stuffing occurred even before the first vote was cast," he added.

Monday's protest is just the first step in a FFS-organised campaign of peaceful resistance to the Zeroual government. "We will not stop at this, but will work on mobilising the people against such practices," Bou'ekwier said. "We realise that of course the government will not respond to our calls for the cancellation of the results," he conceded, "but we cannot remain silent either." The FFS, which came fourth in the June legislative elections, won 646 seats in last week's poll. However, its leaders claim they have "documented proof" that they polled twice what the official results show.

The pro-government RND has dismissed all opposition claims, saying they are simply an attempt to justify their collective failure at the polls. The government newspaper, *Al-Mujahed*, wrote on Sunday that "allegations of electoral fraud — even if they are true in certain cases (as generally happens in numerous democratic countries) — must not distract [Algerians] from the painful circumstances in which [they] are living." It went on, "In such circumstances ... [Algerians] must distinguish between what is essential and what is unimportant."

The winners of Thursday's vote will serve as a pool from which two-thirds of the members of a new parliamentary upper house, the Umma Council, will be drawn. President Zeroual will appoint the remaining third, giving him virtual control over the legislative body. Whilst the Umma Council will not have the power to pass legislation, it will have the right to veto any law passed, so long as 25 per cent of its members agree.

To *La Nation*'s Ghezali though, the elections amount to nothing. "They do not stop the violence or improve the deteriorating economic situation," she said. "The government can go on boasting about its so called 'overwhelming victory', but now that the elections are over, how long can they claim victory with so much blood flooding the country?" she asked.



A child walks through the Sidi R'izine cemetery near Benthala in the Mitidja plain near Algiers. More than 200 people have been murdered in this area by suspected Islamist militants *(photo: Reuters)*

Unlocking Lockerbie

Mandela's public intervention in the Lockerbie issue, backing Libya's position, was viewed as a possible turning point to the long-standing crisis, writes **Rasha Saad**

This week, South African President Nelson Mandela succeeded in bringing the Lockerbie issue to international attention in the hope of achieving a breakthrough that could relieve Libya of six-year-old UN sanctions.

Mandela, who toured North African countries and attended the Commonwealth summit held in Edinburgh this week, supported Tripoli's view that the trial of the two Libyans suspected of bombing Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, killing 270 people, should be held in a neutral country other than Britain or the US. The two Western nations succeeded in pressing the Security Council to approve an air and arms embargo against Libya in April 1992 for refusing to extradite the two men for trial in either country.

Though Mandela insisted that he was not interfering in the dispute over the Lockerbie trial, the issue was at the top of his agenda during his recent tour. Mandela defied US protests over his visit to Tripoli and met with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi twice in one week. He also discussed the 1988 bombing with Arab leaders as well as British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the fringes of the Commonwealth summit. Mandela reiterated Libyan fears that the two suspects would not receive a fair trial in Britain or the United States because of the two countries undisguised hatred for Gaddafi and his regime.

Mandela criticised the fact that Britain would be the plaintiff, the prosecutor and the judge at the same time. "For a country to combine the three roles, there can be no justice" he said. The South African leader also asked for the veto power enjoyed by the five permanent UN Security Council members — the United States, Britain, China, France and Russia — to be scrapped.

Following Mandela's extensive meetings with Blair and British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, Britain said for the first time that it would not rule out letting the two Libyan suspects stand trial in a third country. Cook was quoted as saying that he did not totally rule out this possibility, but there remained to be some "formidable obstacles" in the way of such a trial. The British foreign secretary was referring to US opposition and legal technicalities.

Nonetheless, British officials maintained that "it remains firmly our view that Scotland will give these people a fair trial."

Libya argues that it has no extradition treaties with either the US or Britain and that its laws prevent handing over Libyan nationals to foreign countries.

Libya, backed by the Arab League, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Non-Aligned Movement, offered three alternative solutions to end the crisis. One is for the two suspects to be tried at the International Court of Justice in The Hague by Scottish judges and according to Scottish law. The second alternative proposes a trial in any country other than US or Britain, and a third suggests establishing a special court to try the suspects in any country accepted by the Security Council.

Mandela intervention also offered a spark of hope to the families of the victims, who have sharply criticised London's reluctance to accept one of the three compromise solutions offered by Libya.

Jim Swire, spokesman for the families of the victims, met with Cook on the fringes of the Commonwealth summit. Swire, along with Scottish legal experts, has been pressing Cook to allow a trial to take place in The Hague.

Swire welcomed Mandela's intervention and said he was "more optimistic [than he had been] for years" of progress towards a trial for the two suspects. He urged the British government to take the lead on the issue and not to follow the footsteps of the United States, which has ruled out international mediation. He also said that "Lockerbie is our tragedy, not the plaything of politicians or lawyers."

The US labels Libya as a country that supports terrorism and has called for the downgrading of diplomatic ties.

Mandela said that in visiting the country he was repaying a "debt of gratitude" which he owed Libya for the support it gave him during the years of his struggle against apartheid.

However, some observers suggested that this was not the only reason behind his action. Britain's *Daily Telegraph* cited South African political analysts as saying that the ruling African National Congress is chronically short of funds, implying that it wants funding from Gadaffi. Other South African columnists also pointed out that Mandela wants the OAU's and the Non-Aligned Movement's support for South Africa's nomination as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

In all cases, Arab and Western analysts agreed that Mandela's backing of Libya gave great moral support to Gaddafi and was considered a slap in the face for the US.

Accordingly, Mandela received a hero's welcome by thousands of Libyans upon his first visit to their country last week. After driving to Tripoli from Djerba airport in southern Tunisia, so as not to violate the UN embargo, Mandela was greeted by Libyan masses as he arrived at the site of Gaddafi's house which was destroyed in a US air raid in 1986. Gaddafi's adopted daughter, as well as scores of Libyans, were killed in the raid. The Libyan leader decided to keep the remains of the house untouched as a reminder of the American aggression against the Arab state.

Killing resolutions

Growing, if ineffectual, opposition within the Security Council to Washington's favourite pastime of slamming ever-new sanctions against Iraq offers little solace to the Iraqi people, who, as **Sherine Bahaa** reports, are dying at the rate of 10,000 a month as a direct result of the sanctions

Resolution 1134 is the latest among a long list of UN Security Council resolutions which the US started calling for immediately after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. In the latest resolution, the US and Britain want to impose an immediate travel ban on Iraqi officials, allegedly due to Iraq's failure to cooperate fully with UN inspectors responsible for disposing of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The proposal would require 185 UN member states to deny entry or transit through their territory to all members of the Iraqi armed forces, police and intelligence services as well as employees of the Iraqi Defense Ministry and its Military Industrial Commission.

The existing trade sanctions imposed on Iraq are normally reviewed every 60 days. Resolution 1134, however, suspended this review until April 1998, thus dismissing the possibility of even an easing of the trade sanctions in the near future.

The resolution was approved by a majority of 10 to 0 while five nations abstained. It was the first time since the 1991 Gulf War that three permanent members of the Security Council, Russia, France and China, abstained, underlining the growing opposition within the Security Council to imposing more sanctions against Baghdad. Egypt and Kenya, two non-permanent members of the Security Council, also abstained from the vote.

One Western diplomat noted that with five abstentions in the Security Council over the latest resolution, "it seems that the UN has lost its long standing unanimous approval for the first time towards resolutions that deal with Iraq."

In any case, opponents of more sanctions were able to wrest a minor concession from the US-sponsored resolution. This was to suspend the implementation of the new travel sanctions for six months. However, the sanctions will take immediate effect if the UN inspectors decide that Baghdad is not cooperating properly. The Security Council is currently preparing a list of Iraqi officials who will be subject to the travel ban.

Egypt, representing Arab countries at the Security Council, has repeatedly rejected all attempts to impose more sanctions on Iraq. Deputy Foreign Minister Sayed Kassem El-Masri, underlining that Iraq needed to comply with all UN demands, insisted that, nevertheless, "Cairo is also keen to see the sufferings of the Iraqi people come to an end."

According to Arab observers, economic sanctions have become widely unpopular within the United Nations. Arab countries, including those that fought with the US-led coalition to liberate Kuwait, complain that the Council is quick to slap sanctions on Arab and Muslim countries such as Iraq and Libya, but has stood silent while Israel has ignored nearly all Council resolutions for more than 50 years.

With US intransigence becoming more and more flagrant, the Iraqi government has threatened to ban the inspectors altogether from visiting military sites if new sanctions were imposed. That would present Washington with a dilemma: Either to use force to demand compliance, or risk ending the UN monitoring operation that has kept close tabs on Iraq's military capability since 1991.

Seven years of tough sanctions on Iraq have patently failed to realise both the official US objective of full compliance with Security Council resolutions, and Washington's unofficial, if unhidden, agenda of toppling the Saddam Hussein regime.

Eyewitnesses visiting Baghdad recently, recount horror stories of a a massive human tragedy being dramatised every day in the once oil rich country.

Al-Hajj Ghazi Khankan, director of a US-based organisation lobbying for the lifting of sanctions against Iraq, sent a petition to US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in which he warned that if the US persisted in its present policy towards Baghdad, innocent people will die in large numbers. He said that while successive chiefs of the UN inspection teams — formerly Swedish diplomat Ralph Ekeus and currently, Australian Richard Butler — were spending their time searching for hidden weapons, more children were dying every day.

"The current death rate in Iraq, caused directly by the sanctions, numbers some 10,000 human beings per month," said Khankan in his petition.

"These sanctions kill more people each week than Iraq would be able to inflict on foreign armies and countries, at full military strength and its arsenal intact," reiterated Khankan.



Iraqi families are plagued by poverty as a direct result of UN sanctions

A recent report issued by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) has also expressed deep concern over the deteriorating living conditions in Iraq. "Although there has been some improvement in the overall food supply situation following the implementation of Security Council Resolution 986 [the oil-for-food deal], malnutrition still remains a serious problem throughout Iraq," stated the report.

According to the oil-for-food deal, Iraq is allowed to sell $2 billion worth of oil every six months to cover part of its needs of food and medicine. Part of the money also goes to UN monitoring operations and paying compensations to countries which suffered as a consequence of the Gulf War.

The joint FAO and WFP mission noted that between 1991 and 1997, nutritional catastrophe was only avoided in central and southern Iraq as a result of the government's food ration system. In northern Iraq, food aid was provided by WFP and other non-governmental organisations.

"It is strongly recommended that, in addition to an overall improvement of the food supply situation, the international community should continue supporting feeding programmes for selected vulnerable groups who are not adequately covered by the Security Council 986 food distribution plan. These groups include malnourished children under five, hospital in-patients, orphanages and social institutions, internally displaced persons and refugees," stated the report.

Nayef, a 17-year-old Iraqi, said that he could not wipe away from his mind the memory of his intimate friend who died in diabetic comma because an insulin injection was not available.

Iraq used to import $500 million worth of medicine before the embargo, whereas today Iraq receives only $7million worth of medicine.

However, Iraqi Minister of Health Omdet Medhat Mubarak said that the deteriorating state of his country is not only because of lack of medicines but due to the absence of such fundamentals as clean water.

Recommendations thus include giving high priority to the rehabilitation of water and sanitation systems, improving rations for mothers during pregnancy and lactation.

Several Iraqi teachers complained that pupils collapse within classes as a result of deficiency in nutritious elements in their diet. Anisa, a 35-year-old Iraqi mother of three children, said that whatever money she has "is enough only for two of her children to have their breakfasts. Only two of my sons can go to school as they share the same uniform."

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

The Soros scare

Hong Kong's stock market staggers to its feet after its worst ever crash and Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, host of next week's G-15 summit meeting, has named the culprit, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

First Mexico 1995, then Thailand 1997 and now Hong Kong. Last weekend, Hong Kong's Hang Seng index recorded the biggest fall in the stock exchange's history, prompting the question: Has capitalism failed Southeast Asia — and, for that matter, the entire Third World?

As the tide of reality washes over the emerging markets of the South, key financial market players would seem to be to blame. So what lessons can be drawn from Mexico, Thailand and, now, Hong Kong? That financial crises and stock exchange crashes, it seems, go hand in hand with capital account liberalisation in the emerging markets of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Most observers — and not just those who still cling to unfashionable "socialist" ideals — are agreed that external capital has been a major destabilising factor in Southeast Asia. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has long pointed an accusing finger at people like George Soros, the chairman of Soros Fund Management. Once crowned "the man who broke the Bank of England" after he bet against the British pound in 1992 and went on to make $1 billion in the course of a week, Soros's activities have never ceased to be a major cause for concern.

Third World countries have good reason to fear Soros and his ilk. The billionaire's international network of philanthropic organisations are disturbingly political. In the early 1980s, Soros financed what became the "velvet revolutions" in the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Baltic states. Soros first experimented with his native Hungary, where he flooded the country with free photocopiers and pamphlets which ultimately played a crucial role in bringing down the Communist system. Today, Malaysia's Mohamad accuses Soros of targeting Southeast Asia's markets. As the Second Christian Millennium comes to a close, Mohamed's warnings can begin to sound alarmingly prophetic.

But his is not a lone voice crying in the wilderness. "Soros personifies the process whereby private capital has usurped many of the functions of the IMF and the World Bank, ranging from balance of payments and long-term investment financing to oversight of national economic policies," the London-based *Financial Times* explained last week.

Soros describes himself as a "financial, philanthropic, and philosophical speculator." Investment funds bearing his name have earned him a fortune estimated at $2.5 billion.

The *nouveaux riches* of Asia's emerging markets have also cashed in on the liberalisation of capital flows. Southeast Asia has become a magnet for luxury goods — Gucci sells 8 per cent of its products in Hong Kong alone. Over 50 per cent of French cognac and 40 per cent of Scotch whisky ends up in East and Southeast Asia. The region also accounts for 90 per cent of Russian fur sales — and that's in a region that straddles the tropics.

So the question arises: Why should the emerging markets of Southeast and East Asia be subject to the crashes we have witnessed of late? The capitalist path, as should be clear by now, is by no means always strewn with roses. And as every student of economics knows, even the healthiest economies suffer periodic stock market plunges. In their respective attempts to fight such dives, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand have recently resorted to drastic currency devaluation measures reaching 30 per cent and over. But the ripples from Southeast Asia's financial crisis are now threatening to swell to tidal-wave proportions, especially for Third World countries long saddled with the post-independence loss of autonomous exchange rates and monetary policies.

Over the past decade or two, Southeast Asia has attracted huge amounts of foreign money — mainly short-term capital inflows. With independent capital and consistently strong — even phenomenal — growth rates, foreign currency reserves have swelled. With $88.1 billion in reserve — the third largest amount in the world — Hong Kong is no Third World country. This prosperous city is the financial centre not just of China, an achievement in itself, but of the whole Asian continent.

But excellence in attracting foreign capital can easily prove a double-edged sword, with the new and relatively weak Asian financial institutions struggling to cope with the deluge of foreign funds. These institutions have also shown themselves to be particularly vulnerable to sudden reversals of capital flows.

And while the financial markets have made lots of foreign investors very rich, largely unregulated investment practices have sown the seeds of corruption throughout the region. Following Thailand's financial crisis and the Hong Kong crash, borrowing facilities have been withdrawn throughout the markets, and money supply tightened to the point that cash is a very scarce commodity for today's currency trader. In Hong Kong, for example, the lending rate reached an unprecedented 250 per cent last weekend.

Until the financial tornado claimed its first victim in Thailand a couple of months ago causing Southeast Asian markets to nose-dive, real money supply in Southeast Asia was growing at the brisk rate of 20 per cent per annum. In the wake of the shake-up, markets in Thailand have declined by 83 per cent, with those of Malaysia, Indonesia and Hong Kong down by 63 per cent, 53 per cent, and 39 per cent respectively.

Excessive debt and spiralling current account deficits can be seen to have triggered the crises in Mexico and Thailand. When a Third World country liberalises its capital accounts it can borrow and lend on more favourable terms and in more sophisticated markets. The downside, however, is that its economy thereby becomes more vulnerable to violent swings and shifts in market sentiment. Southeast Asia has been no exception. Throughout the region, as capital accounts have been liberalised and advanced financial technologies introduced, bad loans multiplied, connected lending expanded and banks were increasingly unable to meet capital requirements. The events of the last week have shown how costly such mistakes can be.

A recent editorial in the *Financial Times* spelt out the penalties facing over-confident newcomers to the jungle of late-20th-century international finance: "The related currency and banking crises in Asia demonstrate that the liquidity and market depth that result from global capital market integration come at a cost. The IMF records that nearly three-quarters of its members have had significant trouble in their banking systems over the past 15 years. In 14 of these cases the cost of resolving the crises exceeded 10 per cent of gross national product."

The IMF has long come under fire from the South. But now even the *Financial Times*, that bastion of liberal good sense, is beginning to question its role in Asia's financial crisis. "Capital account liberalisation can be a recipe for exacerbating stock market and property bubbles," the paper conceded. "And the role of the IMF in crisis management, where there is an obvious risk of moral hazard, remains controversial."

The Hong Kong crash — coming just two weeks after the World Bank and the IMF held their annual meetings — caught everyone, especially the international financial institutions, by surprise. Prophetically — and ironically — the IMF recently identified absence of quality capital flow information as a cause for concern. According to a recently released IMF report, "one of the many lessons drawn from Mexico was the extent to which the crisis was worsened by the poor quality of information supplied to both the official sector — including the IMF — and the markets." What is more, the report continued, monitoring what it euphemistically refered to as "key financial market players" is not just an option, but a necessity, if it is to be possible to keep some semblance of order.

Malaysia's Mohamad has long urged the World Bank and the IMF to keep a close watch on the private investment sector, instead of simply demanding more and more liberalisation. Next week, he will host a meeting with the leaders of the G-15 group of African, Asian and Latin American countries in Kuala Lumpur. The choice of venue is replete with subtle symbolism, and there is no doubt that the strengthening of Third World economies and financial institutions will be at the top of their agenda.

Mohamad is sure to impress upon his G-15 counterparts the importance of their learning the lessons of the past week once and for all. Yet as long as they are pitted against speculators like Soros, who know all too well how to reap enormous profits by undermining the defences erected to protect embryonic financial institutions from the onslaught of transnational capital, what hope do they have?

Global capitalism cannot exist without exposing even the best defended nations to the risk of a fleecing at the hands of free-booters and privateers. Perhaps if Mohamad gets the more rigorous surveillance of international capital flows that he is expected to ask for, he and his fellow Third World leaders can begin to stem the tide. But they will still be small fish, swimming against one mighty big tide.

Learning the lessons

The G-15 meets in Kuala Lumpur next week to explore the problems facing Third World nations. **Nevine Khalil** takes a look at previous summits

President Hosni Mubarak will head the Egyptian delegation to the seventh G-15 summit meeting in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur beginning next Monday, and will be accompanied by over a dozen prominent Egyptian businessmen.

The globalisation of the world economy, South-South cooperation, economic liberalisation and reorgansing the 8-year-old body are on the summit's agenda. A number of announcements are also expected during the gathering, including Kenya's admittance to the group and Egypt's acceptance to host the 1999 G-15 summit.

More importantly, member states will enact their support for the private sector and its potential role in speeding up the development process in Third World countries by holding for the first time workshops for businessmen on the sidelines of the summit.

During last year's summit in the Zimbabwean capital Harare, participants urged the private sector to play an active role in economic development. The G-15 leaders noted that special attention should be paid to the development of human resources. High on the agenda also in Harare were the issues concerning the liberalisation of trade, investment and possible strategies for facilitating technological cooperation between G15 nations.

Mubarak told the G-15 leaders who met in Harare that the integration of developing countries in the world economy was the sole responsibility of Third World nations. "No one will give us a helping hand unless we take the initiative," Mubarak told the gathering. He also stressed that the gap between developed and developing countries must be bridged. "Any alteration to the world trade system can only be a good thing [from a Third World perspective]," he said.

On the other hand, Mubarak criticised member states for not implementing inter-group initiatives which were expected to expand to include other developing countries. "What has been achieved falls far short of our ambitions," he said, adding that even those projects which had been initiated did not expand to enhance and solidify south-south cooperation. Mubarak pointed out the many challenges facing developing countries whose role is being increasingly marginalised in the new world order. He also called for "constructive dialogue" with the industrialised G-7 nations.

At its creation in 1989 as an offshoot of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G-77, the G-15 was expected to be a closely knit group of third world countries which would improve the performance and efficiency of the NAM states. Now it aims to coordinate economic cooperation among its members, as well as working closely on environmental issues, poverty eradication and desert reclamation. The G-15 also concerns itself with solving the ever-growing foreign debt problems which severely hinder the development of many Third World countries, and attempts to outline a common policy towards the industrialised nations embodied in the G-7 grouping. The GATT agreement also features highly on the G-15's agenda, especially the requirement of lifting custom duties on imports to Third World countries.

The 15 members include India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Nigeria, Argentina, Jamaica, Venezuela, Mexico, Peru, Brazil and Chile, the latter replacing Yugoslavia which was one of the founding members. The economies of most member states rely heavily on oil and natural gas resources. These states control 20 per cent of world oil production, and hold 17 per cent of oil reserves as well as 14 per cent of world natural gas reserves.

In past summits, like the one in 1991 in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, the G-15 deliberated over the future of the NAM in a post-Cold War era and the possible reform of the UN to allow for a more effective role for developing countries within its decision-making chambers. The final communiqué called on all countries to allocate a certain percentage of its territories to green-belt use, the rescheduling of first world debts to the developing countries and increased South-South cooperation. At the end of the summit, 200 businessmen agreed to create a general secretariat to coordinate between the private sectors of member states, and funding a number of development projects.

At the 1992 Dakar summit, Mubarak proposed two projects to enhance relations between developing countries: one in the field of oil, natural gas and the petrochemical industry, and the second was concerned with developing renewable energy sources.

As head of the Egyptian delegation to the 1994 New Delhi summit, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa stressed the need for Africa to break away from the chains of poverty and backwardness and concentrate on developing economic, social and political institutions and opportunities. At its conclusion, the summit called for the expansion of the Security Council, in order to increase the number of both permanent and non-permanent seat holders. This underlined the principle that the new world order should not be drawn up according to the directives and wishes of world powers, but to include wider participation by other Third World countries.

Many of the issues that are addressed at the G-15 summits arise time after time. One of the reasons for this is the fact that issues of development, Third World debt, economic liberalisation among others are indeed ongoing problems that Third World states are constantly grappling with. However, it is well known that the G-15 is plagued with problems of an institutional nature that contribute to the relative lack of cooperation between member states. It remains to be seen whether future summits will act on the various problems or carry on merely discussing.



A word from the wise: South Africa's President Nelson Mandela whispers words of wisdom to Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair in St Andrews, Scotland. The two men who embody the new South Africa and the new Britain got on famously during the Commonwealth summit meeting in Scotland recently *(photo: Reuter)*

Echoes of empire fade

Nigeria's military junta was lambasted, Zimbabwe's Mugabe chastised and Mandela scolded Britain over Libya, writes **Gavin Bowd** from St Andrews

Edinburgh has finally seen the last of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The blanket security surrounding this summit of the leaders of 54 nations caused considerable disruption to the centre of the Scottish capital, with shops and restaurants unusually empty. Indeed, disgruntled locals renamed the event the Commonwealth Holiday on Government Money, as delegates exchanged compliments on the needless trays of canapés that accompanied their power play.

The meeting only aroused interest among a variety of groups of protesters: supporters of Tamil separatists barracked the prime minister of Sri Lanka; gay activists demanded that the homophobic president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, take an 'erotic arousal test' to reveal his repressed sexual inclinations; exiled opponents of the Nigerian regime demonstrated vigorously then ended up fighting among themselves.

Public indifference was even greater when the delegates and their entourages "retreated" in a luxury train to the seaside town of St Andrews, home of golf and the oldest university in Scotland. Here, they tried hard to relax: Tony Blair dressed in the tweeds of a country squire, while others wore open-necked shirts and slacks. They resembled a group of middle-ranking executives on their way to a corporate brain-storming session. The only one to stand out from the crowd was president of Ghana, Fl. Lt. Jerry Rawlings, who shot the first hole at an embarrassing four over par. At St Andrews, Commonwealth heads made 'taking it easy' look as much hard work as speeches and meetings.

The Commonwealth is finding it difficult to find a meaningful role in the face of the 'New Britain' proclaimed by Blair and, more widely, the great diversity of the member-states. At the opening of the summit, Blair managed to upset the Queen with a synthesised jazz version of the national anthem, then introduced a boastful video on 'young' Britain's cultural excellence which left Nelson Mandela and Robert Mugabe distinctly unimpressed. Blair wants to infuse the Commonwealth with a new sense of mission: the promotion of political and economic freedom, and cooperation between rich and poor. The Commonwealth would have a cherished place in the 'ethical' foreign policy of the new Labour government.

The results of the summit cast doubts on the credibility of such a mission. Nigerian human rights activists have been dismayed by the decision not to expel the regime of General Sani Abacha. An oil embargo on Nigeria was even less likely, given that other Commonwealth states and the USA are major customers, and at a time when pressure is building to raise the embargoes on Libya and Iraq.

It is difficult to see how common economic objectives could be agreed upon by such a disparate grouping of nations. Countries such as Singapore, Australia, Canada and India are becoming big players in regional trading blocs. Such prosperous nations — not to mention the richest man in the world, the Sultan of Brunei — are unlikely to agree to a massive redistribution of world wealth, while the lifting of trade barriers may only reinforce the inferiority of poorer, mainly African nations. Appeals to 'moral duty' and a vague sense of imperial belonging will hardly bend the resolve of global capitalism.

The eclectic nature of the Commonwealth inevitably begs the question of who, if anyone, should lead it. Prince Charles — already beleaguered by domestic events — has declared that it is up to the 'people' to decide if he should assume the mantle of figurehead after his mother's death.

Some leaders look to Nelson Mandela, a figure both charismatic and genuinely powerful, who marked the summit with his pressure for a neutral trial of the Libyans accused of the Lockerbie bombing. But if Mandela is universally admired, in public at least, he is very much an African figure, and is handicapped by his age and physical frailty, which was evident to all those who saw him in Edinburgh and St Andrews. The reality is that the Commonwealth is only a 'community' in the sentimental sense, and, for this reason, the best figurehead remains Queen Elizabeth II. But the Queen is a weary and battered woman who acknowledges that she finds the contemporary world puzzling. Echoes of empire are fading as we prepare to leave the twentieth century.

Can Yeltsin's charm offensive work?

Changes in Russia are irreversible, says Russian President Boris Yeltsin. But why is America still suspicious, asks **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

Changes in Russia's political and economic system are irreversible, the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, said on Tuesday. In a rare interview with the Moscow daily *Sevodyna*, Yeltsin said that Russia had come a long way since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Yeltsin recalled the events of 10 years ago when he put his career on the line at a secret Communist Party meeting by denouncing the personality cult developing around the then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. As a result of this challenge, Yeltsin was dropped from the upper ranks of the party, but later emerged as the leader of the new democratic Russia. He was elected president in 1991.

In the *Sevodyna* interview Yeltsin noted the enormous changes that had taken place under his government. "In the last few years Russia has changed dramatically," he said. "The government's course is now determined by the people themselves." Yeltsin dubbed this adoption of democracy by Russia "The Yeltsin Phenomenon". Among the many other achievements of his government, he continued, ordinary Russians and political parties now have the right to express even critical opinions of their government.

In a separate development, Russia's finance minister and First Deputy Prime Minister, Anatoly Chubais, said in a joint interview with *Reuters* and the London-based *Financial Times* that he planned to introduce tax changes aimed at salvaging Russia's economic reform programme. Chubais suggested that he may seek to have the introduction of new taxes postponed in the hope that such a compromise would expedite the process of economic reform. Under the compromise, which averted a no confidence vote in the government last week, personal income tax changes are tipped to be introduced first — at the beginning of 1998. Chubais said that value-added, sales and profit tax reforms would follow later in the year.

"Some taxes will decrease and others will be increased. Others will be dropped altogether," Chubais said. The essence of the proposed reforms is not simply to reduce the tax burden, but to implement a new system of taxation altogether," he explained. "What is especially important is that it be impossible for the federal or local government to introduce new taxes once the code has been passed."

The tax package is a fundamental aspect of Yeltsin's economic reform programme. In line with International Monetary Fund recommendations, Chubais believes a comprehensive strategy that comes down hard on tax dodgers is an essential feature of this programme. The IMF meets regularly with Russian officials to monitor Russia's economic reform programme. Recent talks, however, have been overshadowed by a deterioration in revenue collection of late. This has led to speculation that the IMF may suspend payment of the next $700 million installment of its $10 billion loan package.

In spite of the radical changes proposed to the Russian taxation system, Russia seems unable to avoid diplomatic rows with its former adversary, the United States. Monday's *New York Times* revealed that Russia recently secretly purchased 16 International Business Machines (IBM) computers for a top-secret nuclear weapons laboratory. The purchase was made in defiance of US export laws which require federal approval for such transactions. A federal grand jury in Washington is examining IBM's role in the sale, handled through a Moscow-based intermediary, to determine whether IBM violated US laws.

Russian officials are furious about this latest row, claiming it demonstrates the absence of trust from the US' relationship with Russia. Furthermore, officials are denying any wrongdoing. They say they were enticed into signing the ban with suggestions from Washington that they would subsequently be able to buy high-powered computer equipment from US corporations.

The US State Department, however, denies that such enticements were offered. "We never promised to provide these kind of computers," State Department spokesman James Rubin said. US laws expressly bar the transfer of computer technology to Russian nuclear weapons installations without case-by-case approval. The State Department claims this approval was never granted. IBM has bought into the argument by stating that the sales, via the intermediary, were valid under US export law. An IBM spokesperson told journalists in New York that the company had always strictly adhered to US technology export laws and that it "intend[ed] to maintain its hard-earned reputation."

The IBM computer sales to Russia threaten to trigger a major diplomatic row between the US and Russia. In a sign of what is perhaps to come, Moscow this week refused to allow US investigators to interview Russian laboratory personnel who have had access to the machines.

Only following orders?

Maurice Papon, on trial for alleged Nazi collaboration, has also been accused of the horrific massacre of Algerians in Paris. **Hosny Abdel-Rehim** reports on the *trial* from Paris and **Faiza Rady** examines its political implications

If the US has somewhat recovered from the "Vietnam complex", France is still haunted by the bloody legacy of its colonial war in Algeria. Revelations of new atrocities are making the headlines in the course of the controversial trial of senior civil servant Maurice Papon. Papon, a minister of the budget under former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, started his career in the Ministry of Interior of the Nazi-installed Vichy government and stands accused of having signed the deportation orders of 1,690 Jews in 1942. During the trial, Papon, who was Police Prefect of Paris under President Charles de Gaulle, was also accused of having at best facilitated, and at worst ordered the killing of at least 200 Algerian demonstrators in Paris on 17 October 1961.

A controversial and ambiguous figure, the 87-year-old Maurice Papon benefits from the protection of high level officials. Testifying last week as a character witness in Papon's defense, former Resistance fighter Laï Camara stated that "everybody [from the Resistance] said that Maurice Papon had served France well [during the Nazi occupation]." Jacques Genton, former senator of the department of Le Cher, testified that the celebrated Resistance hero Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury had assured him he continued to fully trust Papon despite the barrage of *accusations hurled* against him.

"Besides, Bourgès-Maunoury could only have kept him in his administration after France's liberation because of the services rendered to the Resistance by Papon," explained Jena Bozi, a former MP from Corsica. Citing an example of such services, Claude Bochinet, another prominent combatant testified that Papon had put himself at risk in 1943 by sheltering Roger Samuel Bloch, a Jewish member of the Resistance.

Is Papon in fact guilty or has he, as some believe, become a scapegoat in a political battle between the French right and left? Many analysts believe that Papon was put on trial with the intent of discrediting the French right. "Maurice Papon's trial is only a pretext," said Phillipe Séguin, head of President Jacques Chirac's Gaullist Party, Le Ralliement Pour La République (RPR). "There is a deleterious atmosphere, a dangerous degradation in [the level of] public opinion." Suspecting Lionel Jospin's Socialist government of masterminding the Papon trial in an attempt to slander and weaken the right through its promotion of an alleged Nazi collaborator and war criminal, Séguin strongly denounced the ongoing "mind manipulation" against France and the "Gaullist legacy".

Despite Papon's network of powerful supporters, the evidence against him seems damning. Back in 1981, the Paris weekly *Le Canard Enchainé* published documents bearing Papon's signature, authorising the transfer of French Jews from the concentration camp of Mérignac to the Drancy camp. Papon, who had already been tried for "crimes against humanity" in 1981, was then pronounced innocent by an "honour" jury specialising in the investigation of war crimes. In a reference to Papon's first trial, then President François Mitterrand described the charges as a political witch hunt — saying privately that it was absurd to try people 40 or 50 years after the events.

Yet the accusations persisted and a Bordeaux appeals court reopened the case on 23 January of this year, with the proceedings beginning on 4 October. As a defense against Papon's alleged anti-semitism and collaboration with the Nazis, his lawyer Francis Vuillemin presented the court with an Israeli submachine gun, bearing the inscription "To Maurice Papon, Police Prefect, Israeli Military Industries, 1964." — a gift given in appreciation for services rendered to the state of Israel. Vuillemon also disclosed that Walter Eytan, the then Israeli ambassador to France, had personally thanked Papon for his services. Eytan, however, promptly dissociated himself from Papon, saying that he had "no memory" of ever honouring the suspected collaborator.

If Papon's defense case rests on claiming his innocence by providing evidence of his support to Israel, it will surely be insufficient. The Israelis have shown time and again that they have no qualms about dealing with ex-Nazis and Nazi-supporters when it is politically convenient. In the '70s, for example, the Israeli government provided military training in "counterinsurgency" and arms trade to the brutal Argentinian junta — headed by a gang of notoriously anti-Semitic generals, many of whom had ardently supported fascism in Germany. *"Much is known about Israel's cooperation with Argentina*— a state in which, according to Amnesty International, Jewish prisoners are forced to kneel before Hitler's picture," commented prominent Israeli human rights activist Professor Israel Shakak.

Adding to the charges of participating in Nazi crimes, historian Jean-Marc Berlière uncovered Papon's role in the killing of Algerian protesters by the Parisian police on 17 October 1961. During a peaceful demonstration by Algerian citizens against police harassment and the repeated and arbitrary curfews imposed in areas in Paris heavily populated by Algerians, the police opened fire and killed at least 200 people in the most violent and ruthless mass murder ever carried out on French soil since WWII, reported Berlière. Maurice Papon, then Prefect of Paris, authorised the killings — giving the police the green light to shoot Algerians, testified Raoul Letard a 21-year-old police officer at the time.

In a testimony published last Thursday by the French weekly *l'Express*, Letard said. "When we heard about the demonstration, we all ran in pursuit of the 'rats' [Algerians]. We chased them to a housing settlement in Colombes and entered the premises. The tenants called us because they were afraid. We went up to the high-rises and shot everybody in sight... It was horrible, horrible. For two hours we just hunted people down... Finally we departed because there was nobody left to shoot at. A police van followed us to pick up demonstrators. There were many dead people in that van... The Algerians had *planned another demonstration for 1 November*. We were prepared, but then the chief told us that the Prefect [Papon] was not happy because too many corpses were dumped in police stations last time. 'He doesn't want this repeated, but he said that you have carte blanche on the streets,' said the chief."

Letard's testimony is confirmed by many others soon to be published by historian Jean-Marc Berlière, in a book entitled *The Court of 19 August*. Writer, Jean-Luc Enaudi also chronicles Papon's tactics in *The Battle of Paris*, reported the French daily *Libération*. According to Enaudi, Papon started using terror methodically and strategically when he became Police Prefect of Algiers during the war of independence. "In the so-called forbidden zones [the Casba], we killed everything that moved. In the police stations, we tortured. In the concentration camps, people were executed," testified Enaudi during Papon's trial. After Algiers, Papon came to Paris in 1958. Enaudi describes the methods of subversive warfare recommended by the prefect. "He introduced torture in Paris," claims Enaudi, adding that Papon had told his police force: "You can start shooting and we will cover up any incriminating evidence."

Faced with such a damning testimony, Papon defended his actions by claiming that "We had to maintain law and order in the capital." Finally capitulating, he lashed out last Wednesday: "I may be an imbecile, but it was up to my superiors to draw the consequences," implying that he had received his orders from then President Charles de Gaulle or his minister of the interior, Roger Frey. Should Papon's assertion be confirmed during the course of his trial, then the French right has every reason to fear retribution in the upcoming legislative elections. For de Gaulle and his legacy would then stand trial along with Papon, who was, according to his own version of events, only following orders.



Hundreds of thousands of African-American women marched Saturday in Philadelphia. The event was the biggest gathering of black women in America's history. The aim was to draw attention to the problems that plague their communities, such as crime, drug abuse, poor education and health services, and white supremacy. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (above) was the star guest and keynote speaker. *(photo: Reuter)*

A mess at the heart of Africa

Recent revelations have called into question the received history of events in Rwanda and the former Zaire, casting the UN hierarchy and America in a less than flattering light, writes **Jooneed Khan** from Montreal

In an attempt to tidy up the mess left over from the Somalia fiasco, the Canadian government has finally appointed General Maurice Baril as chief of defence staff. But by doing so, it may have set the stage for another, even messier scandal, since Baril was military advisor to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) of the United Nations in the Rwanda crisis in 1994, and was also in charge of a futile UN mission to protect Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaïre at the start of Laurent-Désiré Kabila's offensive against the Mobutu regime late last year.

The one-sided view of the bloodbath in Rwanda as a purely tribal vendetta that led to the genocide of the minority ethnic Tutsi by the machete-wielding militias of the majority Hutu regime has been broken wide open by the release of a faxed message from General Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian commander of UNAMIR, the UN mission in Rwanda, warning Baril and the DPKO as early as 11 January, 1994 that Hutu militias were preparing to slaughter Tutsis at the rate of "1000 every 20 minutes".

In this message, obtained by a Belgian enquiry into the deaths of 10 Belgian peacekeepers at the start of the mass murders three months later, Dallaire told the DPKO in New York, then headed by Kofi Annan, that a reliable informant in President Juvénal Habyarimana's inner circle had identified arms caches to be used in the massacres and that UNAMIR had decided to raid these stockpiles "within 36 hours". He was not seeking UN approval for this plan, but rather asking for arrangements to be made to grant political asylum to his informer and his family.

The DPKO response, also made available by the Belgian enquiry, came the following day. It turned down the request for asylum for the informer, saying this was not part of the Rwanda mandate. But it also vetoed Dallaire's plan to seize the arms caches, advising him and UN special envoy Jacques Booh-Booh to meet instead with Habyarimana and apprise him of the facts. It also advised him to ask the ambassadors of the major UN powers in Kigali to undertake a similar démarche.

On the basis of this correspondance, major TV networks in Canada and the US have been reporting over the past few weeks that the UN was aware a genocide was being planned in Rwanda and did nothing to prevent it. "UN failed Rwandans", the *Washington Post* headlined on 25 September. "A Belgian commission has gathered strong evidence that UN peacekeepers could have prevented the 1994 genocide of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans but were thwarted by higher-ups at UN headquarters in New York", it reported in a story picked up by Reuters news agency and posted on the Netscape Web browser by ABC News.

The Belgian enquiry, including a court martial of the commander of the Belgian peacekeepers and a Parliamentary commission, cited Dallaire and Baril as prime witnesses. It asked them to explain why UNAMIR had not come to the rescue of the Belgian unit when it was being hammered by the French-backed Rwandan army after the death on 6 April of President *Habyarimana and his Burundian* counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira, also a Hutu, when the plane bringing them back from talks with the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in Arusha was shot down by mysterious gunners over Kigali airport.

This event triggered the mass killing of Tutsis and opposition Hutus until the pro-US RPF seized power in July and more than two-million Hutus fled to neighbouring Zaïre and Tanzania.

Dallaire and Baril refused to appear before the Belgian enquiry, arguing theirs had been a UN operation and they would only testify with UN approval, and preferably within a UN framework. Dallaire did reply in writing to a Belgian questionnaire, and his answers were vetted by Kofi Annan. But the exercise has not satisfied the investigators and Dallaire in particular has been subjected to growing pressure, including videotaped pleas from the families of the slain Belgian peacekeepers, to come clean on the whole issue.

The affair broke open last month when Vision-TV, an English-Canadian educational network based in Toronto, programmed a week-long focus on Africa. An award-winning five-hour long documentary entitled *Chronicle of a Genocide Foretold* by Montreal film-makers Yvan Patry and Danièle Lacourse was screened. In a televised debate, Patry was able to confront General Dallaire and Belgian senator Alain Destexhe, a former secretary-general of the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières who has been "decorated" by the RPF for "services rendered", according to former Rwandan Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu, a Hutu who served for more than a year before breaking with the RPF at the end of 1995 and finding asylum in Belgium.

In the course of the debate, Destexhe asks Dallaire to name those who, at the DPKO in New York, vetoed his plan to seize the arms caches of the Hutu militias in January 1994. Dallaire replies that he does not like "blaming others" and that it is "unfair to blame the UN". But he recognises that his mission was "a failure" not just because of the 1994 genocide, but also because of the flight of the millions of Hutu refugees, many of whom were later massacred in Zaïre. And, for the first time, he lays the blame squarely on "the lack of political will of UN member states, notably those which *had powerful embassies in Kigali and* well organised intelligence networks on the ground but which did not share their intelligence with us".

When Destexhe insists, Dallaire tells him he is prepared to "take off my uniform and tell the whole truth" if Destexhe can guarantee his salary. Dallaire then declares, with some exasperation, that Rwanda was a "low priority" issue for the UN, that UNAMIR was understaffed and under-equipped, that member states who had contributed soldiers to UNAMIR "were more concerned for the safety of their own men than for the security of the Rwandan people". He adds, bitterly, that "Rwandans were not as important as Westerners because the big powers took more decisive action in Bosnia when the interests of Europe and the West were directly threatened". He adds that some day he will tell the whole story in a book.

Dallaire's fax and his outburst became public only a few days after General Maurice Baril was named chief of defence staff by the government of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Reacting to Dallaire's statements during the Vision-TV debate, a spokesman for Defence HQ in Ottawa admitted that Baril "took part in the UN secretariat's final decision" ordering Dallaire to refrain from seizing the arms caches. But he added that "it would be inappropriate for General Baril to make any further comments on decisions taken at a political level at the UN".

Baril is further involved in the sequel to the Rwandan massacres since, after *Kofi Annan became UN secretary*-general with determined US backing, he was mandated by the UN in late 1996 to set up a protection force for the Rwandan Hutu refugees trapped in eastern Zaïre by Kabila's RPF-backed offensive against the Mobutu regime. Nearly one million refugees headed back to Rwanda but a good half-million remained behind, scattered and terrorised in the jungles and mountains. The evaluation of the remaining refugees revealed the political leanings of major UN member states: as one diplomat put it, "the French said there were still large numbers of them, the Americans said they were few, and the British flew a couple of aircraft over eastern Zaïre and said that visibility was too poor to hazard an estimate".

General Baril, in agreement with the RPF, finally declared that all the refugees had gone back to Rwanda, and called off his mission. But the Rwandan strongman, General Paul Kagame, a former Ugandan military intelligence officer trained at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, recently told the *Washington Post* he "prepared a scheme to bury the UN refugee protection plan" even as "Canadian, American and British diplomats and officers trooped through his office in Kigali". Worse still, UN Human Rights investigator Roberto Garreton and Médecins Sans Frontières reported this year that between 100,000 and 200,000 Rwandan refugees "disappeared" during Kabila's RPF-led march from Goma to Kinshasa. The UN was forced to set up an investigation. but the US managed to have Garreton replaced and the investigation's mandate modified, while Kabila refuses to let the investigators into the field.

This month, the Association for the Defence of Human Rights in former *Zaïre (AZADHO) and* Human Rights Watch reported that the mass graves were being dug up and the remains of the massacred Hutu refugees were being burnt and the ashes scattered to destroy evidence of this other genocide. Back from that region with countless testimonies and videotaped evidence of mass graves, Scott Campbell of HRW wrote in the *Washington Post* that Rwandan refugees were still being massacred and added that RPF officers in the field were accompanied by US military advisers. This has led Chris Smith, *chairman of the Human Rights Sub*-Committee of the US House of Representatives, to write to President Bill Clinton asking for information on US military and political assistance to the RPF regime in Rwanda.

In Canada, representatives of the disenfranchised Hutu majorities in Rwanda and Burundi, as well as members of the Congolese community from former Zaïre, have written to Prime Minister Chrétien and the media accusing General Baril of having delivered "more than 400,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees, and countless Zaïreans, to soldiers from Rwanda, *Burundi and* Uganda sent to reinforce Kabila's offensive against Mobutu" and asking that he be dismissed as chief of defence staff. "We respectfully welcomed Canada's initiative, which accepted to lead the humanitarian mission set up too late, but which could still have made a substantial difference if the same General Baril had not decided, following a brief ride in an RPF vehicle, to declare his mission over under the pretext that no refugee was left on *Zaïrean soil*," wrote one petitioner.

To compound matters, a member of the former Enquiry Commission into the Somalia scandal, where Canadian soldiers were accused of atrocities and Defence HQ in Ottawa of hiding information from the media, launched a book *last week saying the* government's latest military reforms were half-measures that might be worse than no reforms at all. The Somalia investigation was cut short by the government, and a frustrated Peter Desbarats, a veteran professor of journalism, said the government's refusal to appoint an inspector-general to watch over the military, as the commission had recommended, might "encourage the generals to believe they are a law unto themselves".

The dragon awakens

Visiting Beijing on the eve of President Jiang Zemin's historic visit to the US, **Salama Ahmed Salama** ventured into the Forbidden City for an exclusive audience with Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng

When I visited China for the first time in 1987, the great transformation movement set in motion by Deng Xiaoping was already well underway. The country was undergoing what was virtually a second revolution, following the crisis that had struck the Marxist communist regime established by Mao. The cultural revolution had precipitated a period of chaos, which was only brought to an end by the elimination of the Gang of Four. This transition was consolidated by Deng Xiaoping's election to the leadership of the Communist Party after Mao's death. Deng immediately set himself to introducing an ambitious programme of reform, whose goal was effectively to rebuild the Chinese economy from scratch. In doing so, he radically changed the fate of China and profoundly altered the lives of its 1,200 million inhabitants.

Ten years in the life of China seem to have made quite a difference. The grey-blue Mao suits worn by men and women alike have disappeared from the streets of Beijing and Shanghai. In their place are boutiques selling the latest fashionable designs from Paris and Rome. Shop windows are filled to bursting with every imaginable kind of consumer good. The streets swarm, not with bicycles, but with European and Japanese-brand cars (all made in China). Young men and women loiter on street corners talking into their mobile phones.

It is Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, implemented over the last twenty years, that have been responsible for opening up China to the world economy and the communications revolution. Agricultural reform succeeded in salvaging almost two-thirds of the Chinese population from poverty and backwardness, and helped the nation achieve a substantial degree of self-sufficiency in cereals, thus putting an end to the eternal cycle of famine and crisis. Deng then turned his attention to other sectors of the economy, tapping modern capitalist management methods, modernising the means of production and introducing modern technology to produce what he called "socialism with Chinese characteristics".

The next turning point came with the 14th Congress of the Communist Party in 1992. Deng succeeded both in formally establishing his reformist ideas as part of the party's official programme, and in propagating his vision of China as one state with two systems. This, he claimed, gave the Communist state an historical advantage over its rivals — Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. The 15th congress in September of this year went one step further, incorporating Deng's reform concepts as an integral part of the constitution.

By the time the Tiananmen Square protests had been put down by the army, Deng's reforms had already made considerable strides towards liberating the Chinese economy from the constraints of the past. The country had caught the attention of the outside world and the prospect of privatisation promised lucrative returns. Foreign capital began to flood into the Chinese markets. To oversee this process, Deng chose Jiang Zemin, the present head of state and secretary-general of the Communist Party, and Prime Minister Li Peng. The two men stood against ideological petrification within the party. But they were equally opposed to any external pressure on China to bow to the demand for Western-style "democratic" and human rights, a demand which had spread like wild fire among students and intellectuals.

I arrived in Beijing only a few days after the 15th Congress of the Communist Party had unanimously designated Jiang Zemin as the new leader of the party, and removed his remaining rivals from positions of influence. The Congress had also reconfirmed its commitment to the economic reform programme as the basis on which a third revolution can now be precipitated to carry China into the 21st century. Marxist definitions have been firmly consigned to the past. Today, in China, "socialism" is a capacious term, meaning "any system that helps increase productive capacity, that consolidates brotherly ties, realises the well-being of the people and strengthens the ability of the state and the regime to resist threats to their stability." It is in this sense of socialism that the Congress went on to define the objective of its reforms as the establishment of "a socialist market economy which applies capitalist methods and free market principles without any ideological constraints."

However, as China braces itself for its third revolution, in which state and party intervention are to be reduced, and in which "socialist" market forces will be given greater freedom of movement, it is becoming more and more difficult for her to forge a balance between domestic stability and global change. Chinese leaders know only too well that if they are to succeed in their economic programme and be able to compete with the developed industrial nations, then they must adopt a foreign policy which puts easing tension and avoiding conflict first. This in turn means, above all, establishing good relations with the US — playing down their differences over Taiwan, defusing military rivalry in the Pacific and establishing cooperation in the domain of nuclear technology.

It is for this reason that the recovery of Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong is of such enormous political and economic significance. For China, it is the opportunity to prove to the world that it will indeed honour its word, by preserving the capitalist economy of Hong Kong and the freedoms that go with it.

Today, the offices of the country's leaders are housed in the "Forbidden City", formerly the home of the Chinese emperor. It was in one of these graceful high-ceilinged buildings, whose walls are decorated with the most delicate works of ancient Chinese art, that I met with Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng.

In keeping with Chinese custom, we sat side by side, next to our interpreter. The prime minister is 68 years old, and is in excellent health after ten years in office. The party is due to elect a new prime minister in March, and Li Peng is now widely tipped to succeed Jiang Zemin as president.

Prime Minister Li Peng began by welcoming me, extolling *Al-Ahram* as the "most famous and most influential newspaper in the Arab world." Before the interview proper began, I broke the ice by asking about President Jiang Zemin's current visit to the United States — the first official visit to the US by a Chinese leader for over twelve years.

A meeting between the leader of the largest developing nation in the world and the leader of the most highly-developed nation in the world was, in itself, a momentous event, the prime minister told me. The two leaders, he confided, will discuss a broad range of issues covering international and regional concerns, as well as bilateral relations.

And he added: "There are many differences between [America and China]. Our values are different. Our respective levels of economic development and progress and our approach to regional issues differ. We must seek to contain these differences through dialogue, so that they do not turn to confrontation."

What are the most important aspects of the reform programme that is contained in the recommendations of the 15th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party that was held recently? Do the recommendations include political reform or are they restricted to economic reform alone?

The 15th Congress of the Communist Party upheld the theories of Deng Xiaopeng as the guiding principles of the party. The party is committed to reform leading to a "socialist market economy."

Already there have been numerous breakthroughs — in restructuring and streamlining the structure of ownership, developing a multi-ownership-based economy with the public sector as its largest component, hastening reforms of state-owned enterprises, modernising economic institutions, enhancing both the structure and the modes of distribution while still adhering to the principle of "to each according to his labour", activating the market mechanism to the greatest possible degree, strengthening the fundamental role of agriculture and enhancing economic diversification.

In addition, we have made great strides in applying our strategy of educational development for sustainable development, as we continue to increase our openness to the world economy and tap the influx of foreign currency in the most effective manner possible.

As the same time as restructuring its economy, China will also restructure its political system. Our major tasks at present and in the near future will be to develop democracy, enhance the legal system, further the separation of government and production, trim administrative excess in order to enhance the efficiency of government, improve the system of democratic controls and maintain stability and unity.

One question that is frequently asked outside China, and perhaps inside China as well, is the extent to which your country can succeed in using "market economics" or other modes of capitalist development in order to achieve Chinese socialism. How does China deal with the adverse affects of economic liberalisation?

We do not believe that a market economy is solely a capitalist asset. Socialism, too, can implement market economy practices. It is our aim to restructure the economy so as to build a "socialist market economy" We want to take advantage of all the different forms of organisation that are possible, so as to reflect the broad and very varied basis of production in our society.

The course we have adopted takes the public sector as its basis, and encourages joint growth initiatives in cooperation with numerous other sectors of the economy. We will continue to change and improve the ownership structure, which is a momentous part of the task of restructuring the economy.

The non-public sector of the economy in China has achieved considerable growth, and constitutes an important component of the Chinese socialist market economy. We intend to continue to encourage it and guide it towards healthy growth, so that it can be ever more instrumental in meeting the demands of the market, increasing employment opportunities and enhancing the nation's productive capacity.

China is currently passing through a transitional phase in terms of its economic structure. As a result of numerous factors, both internal and external, certain problems, such as money worship, corruption and crime, have begun to make themselves felt in our social and economic life.

However, we have and we value the means to solve these problems. Firstly, we can strengthen the moral fabric of Chinese socialist culture through a consciousness-raising drive, in order to lift the standards of probity of the Chinese people as a whole. Secondly, we can act to stop the growth and spread of corruption. Thirdly, we can strengthen the growth of democracy and improve the system of democratic checks in order to prevent the abuse of power. In so doing, it is essential that we commit ourselves to the rule of law.

The law must be applied strictly and uniformly. All offenders must be punished regardless of their status in society and there must be harsher penalties for crimes such as embezzlement and bribery. By these means, we will be able to ensure that our country's modernisation continues in a healthy manner.

How does the Chinese leadership perceive the future? How are they going to fulfil the aspirations of the Chinese people? And what role do you expect China will play in Asia and the Pacific?

Peace and development are still the most important issues of the world today. As the world order is moving toward greater openness, the multi-polar system is experiencing sweeping global economic and political changes which serve the interests of international peace, stability and prosperity.

At the same time, the people of the world are crying out day after day for greater equality and fairness coupled with peaceful coexistence. The drive toward making peace, strengthening cooperation and furthering development is the great impulse which is carrying our age forward. It is our view that these circumstances make it possible to avert the prospects of a new world war in the long term and that they bring peace and development throughout the world closer within reach.

The people of China are in the process of building socialism with a Chinese character. Our aim is to modernise the country from its foundations up between now and the middle of the 21st century. Our vision is a vision of a socialist China that is wealthy, powerful, democratic and civilised.

To achieve this, China needs an enduring stable and peaceful international climate and an environment of good neighbourliness and friendly relations, so that we can concentrate on economic development and raising the standards of living of the Chinese people. The rapid and sustained development of the Chinese economy since the introduction of economic reform and the open-door policy 19 years ago owes much to the climate of regional stability and peace.

At the same time, the development and growing prosperity of the Chinese economy has helped peace and prosperity in the region take root and flourish. China will continue to work towards peace and development in the region and will remain committed in performing its duties in this respect. A strong and stable China, one that continues to grow in strength, will never pose a threat to any other country. On the contrary, it will be able to make an even greater contribution to peace and development in Asia and the world.

Following the recent visit of Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri to China, our two countries signed a number of agreements and memorandums of understanding. What progress has been made in strengthening economic cooperation between China and Egypt? Have any joint industrial enterprises been initiated?

Thanks to serious joint Egyptian and Chinese efforts, economic and commercial relations have developed rapidly in recent years. The volume of trade between the two countries now exceeds $400 million. Economic and commercial exchange is an important part of the friendly relations that exist between Egypt and China, and we believe that there is enormous latent potential for broadening the realm of economic and commercial cooperation.

Toward this end, both our governments must encourage our respective business communities to build up their contacts with and knowledge of each other. At this moment, Chinese officials together with certain companies are discussing with their Egyptian counterparts the possibilities of establishing joint enterprises that would be appropriate to the different circumstances of both countries. I have every confidence that fruitful cooperation in diverse forms and at various levels will continue to expand day after day in time with the continued economic development of both our countries.

During the visit of Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri to China last April, we signed a memorandum of understanding according to which China will assist Egypt in creating a free trade zone in Suez. For its part, the Chinese government is extremely interested in this project. The Chinese governmental agencies involved in this project have already submitted a proposal to their Egyptian counterparts. We hope to receive a rapid response so that we can move on quickly to the next phase.

Egyptian-Chinese relations in the field of cultural, academic and technological cooperation are still relatively limited. What can be done to encourage more extensive cultural exchange between the two countries?

Both China and Egypt have very ancient civilisations and relations between them have deep historical roots. Egypt was the first Arab and African nation to establish diplomatic relations with China. And, in spite of the profound international and regional changes affecting our countries over the past half-century, the friendship between us, which is based on mutual understanding and respect, stands firm.

As we moved into the 1990s, there were many new developments in our relationship. Not only have we maintained a stance of close cooperation and mutual support in international affairs, but we have established mutually advantageous bonds of cooperation in all political, economic, commercial, agricultural, scientific, technological and cultural domains.

China has always considered Egypt a vital partner in our relations with the Arab and African worlds. We look forward to working more closely still with the Egyptians, on our traditional basis of equality coupled with mutual respect and benefit, as the relations of friendship and cooperation between our two countries move forward into the 21st century.

Egypt and China signed a cultural cooperation agreement as far back as 1956. Since then, cultural exchange and scientific and technical cooperation between us has intensified and has been very fruitful. China has participated in every international book fair and international cinema festival held in Cairo.

In addition to an annual educational exchange programme between the two countries, a team of Chinese technical trainers is currently working in Egypt. Numerous agreements for scientific and technical cooperation have been signed between our two countries in recent years. They have been very successfully implemented and have contributed to the scientific and technological progress of both countries.

Last April, the Chinese Board of Sciences signed an agreement with the Egyptian Ministry of Local Government to promote cooperation between the Chinese "Spark Programme" and the Egyptian "Sunrise Programme". We anticipate that, once it is put into effect, this scheme will yield excellent results.

What is China's position at present viv-à-vis the Middle East conflict and the tensions in the Gulf region?

As a pioneer in the Middle East peace process, Egypt now enjoys international acclaim for its contributions toward a just and comprehensive settlement to this conflict. The peace process has made significant progress as a result of the strong impetus given to it by the international community as well as by all the parties involved.

However, we are deeply concerned by the current stalemate. We believe that all the countries of the region will be unable to enjoy real security until they reach a just and comprehensive settlement that not only matches the interests of the region itself, but furthers the cause of peace and development in the world as a whole. It is our wish that the parties concerned should overcome all obstacles to and distortions of the underlying principles of the peace process, which are based on the relevant UN resolutions and the principle of land for peace, so that they can resume peaceful negotiations as quickly as possible.

We hope to see the day, soon, when the countries of the region and the world can put the Middle East conflict behind them and all nations in the region can enjoy the fruits of peace, stability and development.

The Chinese government greatly cherishes its traditionally friendly relations with the countries of the Arab world. It has always supported the just rights of the Arabs and continues to support Egypt's tireless efforts and central role in the peace process. China will continue as always to strive, together with the international community, to push the peace process forward.

The Chinese government has also always supported the aspirations of the Arab Gulf countries for unity and cooperation and opposed any external threat or intervention in their affairs. We therefore support a just and reasonable solution to the unfinished business of the Gulf War, again on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

It is the opinion of the Chinese government that as long as the problems left behind by the Gulf War remain unresolved, peace and development in the region wil be obstructed and the aspirations of those countries to improve their mutual relations and develop their national economies will be impeded. China gives a high priority to its relations with the countries of the Gulf and is keen to preserve, enhance and extend its bonds of friendship and cooperation with them all across a broad range of activities.

How is China handling the problems that it encounters in the process of liberalising state-owned economic institutions? How accurate are Western statistics which suggest that between 70 and 100 thousand state-owned businesses have large financial deficits?

Clearly those figures are exaggerated. The fact is that many of our state-owned companies, particularly those operating in the primary sectors and the vertical growth industries have shown excellent performance. The companies that are showing losses are primarily in the traditional industries and in other sectors such as mechanical industry, textile manufacture, light industry, the mining industries (with the exception of iron ore), as well as the chemical and military industries.

These problems are difficult to avoid during a period of economic transformation. China has more than 80,000 state-owned industries, of which more than 80 per cent are small-scale industries. A third of the state-owned industries are showing deficits, and 80 per cent of those are small-scale industries. On the surface, the number of loss-making companies is indeed daunting, but the overall assets and profits of these small-scale institutions constitutes a relatively small proportion of the overall profit-loss calculation.

In contrast, most of the large state-owned enterprises are very profitable. There are 512 major state-owned enterprises to which the central government attaches particular importance. These companies constitute only 10 per cent of the total number of industrial enterprises. Yet, they account for 55 per cent of the state's industrial assets, over 60 per cent of returns on sales and more than 85 per cent of profits and tax revenues. Therefore, the number of loss-making industries alone does not provide an accurate picture of the performance of China's state-owned industries as a whole.

In this period of transition to a market economy many state-owned industries are encountering difficulties of varying degrees of severity. There are several reasons for this. Reforming state-owned industries is one of the goals of restructuring the Chinese economy. We have to focus our attention on improving the performance of the state-owned industries as a whole.

This does not merely mean modernising these institutions, but reformulating the entire strategy for public sector enterprise. It is a strategy that requires the government to hold on to its large-scale industries, disengage from the small-scale industries — so as to sift out the healthy ones from the weaker ones, reduce the labour force and boost performance — and take the necessary measures to modernise and streamline the administration and operations of the state-owned enterprises.

At present, the government is promoting the merger of high-performance enterprises with those which are not as productive. At the same time, we must be prepared to sacrifice those loss-making institutions that have no hope of being turned round, while absorbing the surplus labour through various channels and providing for a system of social security.

These measures have already yielded many positive results. Increasing numbers of state-owned industries have reorganised themselves and made a considerable recovery. The 15th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party has proposed a range of clearly-defined measures to hasten the reform of state-owned industries. We are convinced that, with concerted and sustained efforts, it is possible to extricate the overwhelming majority of large- and medium-scale state-owned enterprises from their current predicament.

Does China have an unemployment problem? Some sources say that approximately 100 million Chinese people, i.e. 20 per cent of the population, leave their villages to look for work in the cities and new industrial centres.

China has a population of 1.2 billion which is increasing annually by 13 million. 80 per cent of the population lives in the countryside. As agricultural productivity has increased there has been a corresponding increase in surplus rural labour. It is a problem encountered by all developing nations.

Since the 1980s, Chinese farmers have established a number of village-based agricultural enterprises which in turn have boosted the rural economy and increased the farmers' income. They have also contributed to solving the employment problem for a large number of farm workers, thus stemming the trend to random migration to the cities. So far, we have been able to absorb 120 million agricultural workers nation-wide into these village enterprises. In addition, approximately 60 million farmers have moved from less developed inland regions to the more developed coastal areas, where there is a higher demand for agricultural labour, thus increasing the development potential of both regions.

The government's responsibility in this regard is to ensure that the migration of labour is smoothly regulated so as to protect the rights of the labourers and safeguard social stability. A large proportion of this labour force is well-trained and constitutes the backbone of the farming industry. In order to absorb the more recent additions to surplus rural labour, the government has adopted a policy of encouraging the establishment of new rural enterprises and a productive sector dependent upon local raw materials.

China does have a problem of unemployment. There are approximately 6 million registered unemployed, or about 5 per cent of the population, although the actual figure may be somewhat higher. The government has plans to train workers released from their jobs in order to rehabilitate them for other employment, in the hopes of reducing unemployment to a more acceptable rate.

Environmental conservation has become an important component of sustainable development. Some observers say that China, in its determination to accelerate economic growth, has not given environmental concerns sufficient consideration. Does China have a specific environmental policy?

China began to devote attention to environmental protection in the first phases of reform and the open-door policy, and as such it constitutes a priority policy area for the state. Numerous environmental laws and programmes have been passed and put into effect.

In the realm of water conservation, for example, in 1996 alone more than 1100 paper factories were closed down. These were small-scale factories, located on the Huang He River, whose yearly production did not exceed 5,000 tons. An additional 60,000 small factories were also closed down across the nation due to the high levels of pollution they were causing.

In the 19 years since economic reform was introduced, China has averaged 9 per cent growth in GNP. Yet it has managed to avoid a corresponding deterioration in the environment. Last March, during the fourth session of the National Assembly, the people's representatives approved the 9th five-year plan and the long-range targets for economic and social development until the year 2010, thereby reaffirming our strategy of sustained development for the modernisation of China. We asked our leaders at every level to give their personal attention to environmental concerns, so that the strategy of sustained development can be implemented effectively.

What is the significance of the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty? How will this effect the Chinese model of development and China's prospects for enhancing its position in the world order? Is there a danger that the West will use Hong Kong as a pretext to intervene in Chinese affairs?

The return of Hong Kong has freed the Chinese nation from the shame of a humiliation inflicted on it a hundred years ago. It symbolises the achievements of successive generations of the Chinese people and has ushered in a new age in Chinese history — the age of "a single nation with two systems" and "the administration of Hong Kong by the people of Hong Kong".

China has taken a great step forward towards national reunification. The return of Hong Kong and the progress that has been made since then have proven indubitably that the concept of "a single nation with two systems" is a highly practical one. It also augurs well for the return of Macao, and eventually Taiwan, in accordance with the principle of "peaceful unification and a single nation with two systems."

As an important international commercial and financial centre, Hong Kong will contribute greatly to enhancing the economy of inland China and to strengthening economic links between China and other countries. At the same time, easier access to the rest of China will help bolster the continued growth and stability of Hong Kong's economy, offering numerous facilities as well as a vast market. The greater part of the trade that transits through Hong Kong is closely connected with inland China, and there have long been good economic relations and joint development projects with the city.

"A single nation with two systems" was an important component of Deng Xiaopeng's philosophy, and Hong Kong's stability and continued growth is a vivid embodiment of this principle. Hong Kong is an international city. It is a city where all countries and regions can engage in their legitimate economic and cultural activities, thereby enhancing the mutual interaction between Hong Kong and the world, and between China and the world.

At the same time, we will not allow any individual or nation to use Hong Kong as a means to intervene in the internal affairs of our nation.

Pursuing Arab economic integration

The possibility of broader Middle East regional economic integration — one which includes Israel — is becoming more remote as a result of political considerations. Mohamed El-Erian presents the case for Arab economic integration

Earlier this year, the governments of several Arab countries agreed to revitalise efforts to increase Arab economic integration. This renewed emphasis comes at an opportune time, as several Arab countries have taken important steps to enhance the "enabling economic environment." There is thus scope for a beneficial increase in regional economic activities, thereby complementing efforts at the national level to sustain high economic growth and employment creation.

Greater Arab economic integration is worth pursuing for three reasons: First, it offers individual Arab countries scope for welfare improvements as the region makes more efficient use of its resources, by exploiting opportunities for complementarity and economies of scale.

Second, it will help increase the benefits of other Arab trade initiatives, particularly by enhancing the responsiveness of foreign direct investment to the implementation of the partnership agreements with the European Union.

Third, it will strengthen the region's collective bargaining power in extra-regional economic affairs and negotiations.

Like most things in life, Arab economic integration is not without its challenges. Economically, it will involve structural changes, with both winners and losers. Operationally, it will require the compilation of detailed data, and stronger enforcement and dispute settlement procedures. There will also be a temptation to substitute it for multilateral liberalisation. This temptation must be resisted.

International experience has shown that, if well managed, regionalism can serve as a "stepping stone" to multilateral integration as opposed to a "stumbling block." As recognised by their governments, Arab economies need to integrate more fully with the international economy. This offers them greater trade opportunities, higher inflows of foreign direct investment, and faster transfer of technology and know-how. All these factors are important components of a high economic growth strategy.

As Asia's experience with "open regionalism" demonstrates, regional economic integration can be an integral element of a multilateral liberalisation process.

In the case of our region, the urgency for dismantling trade barriers between Arab countries is heightened by the on-going negotiations of free trade arrangements with the European Union. Freer trade among Arab countries is needed to promote foreign direct investment in the Arab region. In the absence of free trade and, more generally, greater economic integration among Arab economies, there would be considerable incentives for foreign investors to set up shop in Europe as a means of accessing the Arab markets. This would undermine one of the potential advantages for the Arab countries of the partnership agreements, with all its benefits in terms of employment creation and spill-over effects.

There is thus a strong case on several grounds for pursuing greater Arab economic integration. Yet, the historical record on this issue is disappointing. This is particularly puzzling as the Arab region has three important characteristics that greatly facilitate regional integration.

On the economic side, the region has a diverse natural, human and financial endowment that is spread among countries in the region. In addition, the regional market offers considerable purchasing power. There are also clear indications of "trade creating" opportunities and complementary production and service structures.

On the geographical front, the region covers a large contiguous land mass with relatively accessible regional trade routes.

Finally, on the cultural front, the region has a very high degree of language and cultural coherence which greatly facilitates regional interaction.

Despite these favourable conditions, the amount of Arab economic interaction has remained well below its potential. Trade among the countries of the region has fluctuated between a mere six to eight per cent in recent years. This is well below levels in Europe and Asia (some 60 per cent), as well as in Latin America (20 per cent).

Moreover, for no country in the Arab region does trade with other Arab countries account for more than 25 per cent of total trade. There has been a greater degree of regional interaction in the form of labour movements. However, some labour flows have been subjected at times to disruption as a result of political developments, the most pronounced being the events triggered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

To understand why the scope for Arab regional interaction has not been sufficiently exploited, one needs to consider the economic policy dimension. To put it another way, the basic economic, geographical and cultural conditions mentioned above are necessary but not sufficient conditions. On the economic front, you also need a strong "enabling environment" at the individual country level. That is to say an environment that encourages trade, led by private sector activities.

Until recently, the trade regimes of many non-oil Arab countries were relatively protective as a result of high tariff and non-tariff barriers. This discouraged not only regional trade but also international trade. Indeed, at a time when the developing countries' share of world trade increased from 23 per cent in 1985 to 29 per cent in 1995, that of Arab countries fell from five per cent to three per cent.

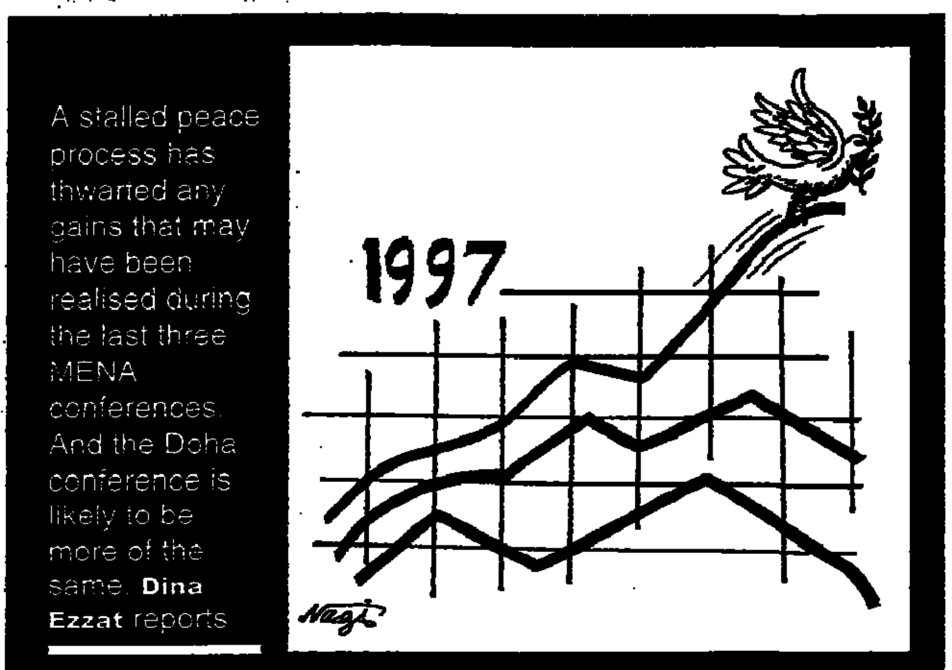
In the last few years, we have seen an important change in the enabling economic environment of the non-oil Arab countries. Several of them — led by Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia — have strongly improved their macroeconomics situation and intensified structural reforms aimed at liberalising external trade, deregulating domestic activity, privatising and reforming the financial sector. The aim has been to stimulate private sector-led production and investment while reducing financial imbalances. The results are encouraging as we are witnessing reductions in inflation, higher growth and investment rates, and increased interest on the part of regional and international investors.

It is this improvement in the enabling environment that provides a greater chance of success for Arab economic integration efforts. A continuation of these trends, by further strengthening economic fundamentals, will be reflected in increased regional Arab interaction. The process will also be helped by specific measures aimed at developing a common (or single) market by removing rigidities to regional trade and other economic relations. These include reducing divergence in regulatory frameworks (including customs nomenclatures), improving the ability to move goods between Arab countries, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and enhancing regional communication facilities. Institutional linkages — such as that concluded earlier this year between the stock markets of Beirut, Cairo and Kuwait — also play an important role.

By building on the progress achieved in recent years in macroeconomics adjustment and structural reform, Arab economies will facilitate Arab economic integration. By ensuring that this integration is of the open variety — and by that I mean that it is accompanied by multilateral liberalisation — Arab economics will be significantly better placed to exploit their considerable economic potential and improve substantially the welfare of their population.

The writer is deputy director of the Middle Eastern Department of the International Monetary Fund. The views expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the IMF.

What does another MENA mean?



Four years after the first Middle East/North Africa economic summit in Casablanca in 1994, the vision of a new Middle East defined by Arab-Israeli economic cooperation, based on regional peace and political stability, remains unfulfilled.

The upcoming Doha MENA conference, which stirred dissent throughout the Arab world as a result of a still-stalled Middle East peace process, seems unlikely to bring any of the projects and plans, proposed during previous MENA conferences, closer to fruition.

Regional projects aimed, for example, at building a railroad across the region or linking the electrical grids of the Middle Eastern nations along the Mediterranean, which were discussed in the last few MENA conferences, have not yet seen light of day.

Also stalled are the plans for the initiation of the four business and financial institutions that were supposed to transform the ideas of inter-regional cooperation, aired in Casablanca, into reality.

Of the four organisations proposed in Casablanca, the Middle East-North Africa Bank for Cooperation and Development, considered to be the core organisation in the framework of regional cooperation, is still in the first phase of studies.

"The bank [as a concept] has already been decided upon, but many things still depend on the developments [in the region] and the studies to be undertaken in the near future," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The bank was supposed to start with a paid-up capital of $1.25 billion. This amount was to increase to a total capital of $5 billion over a five-year period. Its operational guidelines suggest that it could offer loans to governments, businessmen and organisations that are willing to undertake regional projects, or national projects that could have a regional impact such as building a coastal highway along the Mediterranean aimed at facilitating inter-regional transport and trade.

Negotiations for the operation of the bank ended in February 1996, and six months later the project was open for signing in the United Nations. However, most of the countries involved in the project, including Egypt which should be host to the bank's headquarters, have not signed it into existence.

A task force made up of representatives of the core regional cooperation countries: Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Israel as well as the US — which will provide 21 per cent of the bank's capital — and other participating regional and European countries are meeting in Cairo to sort through the details delaying the signing.

A key impediment cited by Arab diplomats is that the bank's resources are too limited to be considered the financial backbone of inter-regional development and cooperation.

"The bank has an obvious political connotation, but the resources are very limited," said one diplomat involved in the launching of the bank, speaking on condition of anonymity. "So the fact that even at this level you have problems is very significant of the political mood in the region."

The second project, the Middle East Mediterranean Tourism Agency, has had slightly better luck. Based in the Tunisian capital, the agency has been "semi-functional in a non-official manner," said the diplomatic source.

What this means is that "the countries involved can hold meetings... but since the main countries have not yet ratified the charter of the agency... whatever is done is not official," he said. "It also means that this agency is not registered and cannot have a bank account or sign deals."

The third project, the Regional Business Council has not yet found a capital for its headquarters, and the idea for the council, on the whole, has remained dormant for over two years.

The MENA conference's secretariat, charged with following up on the progress of these and other regional projects, as a result, has had little to do over the past three years.

"Nobody can deny that political developments are bound to affect the concepts of regional cooperation," said Moussa.

"If economic cooperation is to develop, [then] the peace process needs to develop," he said, adding that a settlement agreeable to all parties concerned in the Arab-Israeli conflict must also be reached.

Since the Casablanca summit, Moussa has clearly stated that "the framework, and sine-qua-non — I avoid saying condition — for ensuring the success of such a regional project is to reach a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab countries."

Many Egyptian, Arab, Israeli and Western officials and businessmen tend to agree that the drastic deterioration in the peace process, blamed on hardline Israeli policies, is the main handicap.

Israeli's intransigence with regard to the peace process has prompted a number of Arab states to call on Qatar to delay or cancel the upcoming MENA conference. Some Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Syria and Lebanon, have declared that they will boycott the conference. But Qatar has, nonetheless, remained steadfast in its decision to hold it as scheduled.

The only concession made by the Qatari government was to reduce the level of representation, making it a conference for foreign ministers instead of heads of state.

For some Arab countries like Egypt, however, this has not been enough to guarantee their participation. Instead, they have linked their attendance to progress in the peace process.

According to Moussa, Egypt is not ignoring the fact that there is an economic conference, but equally it cannot ignore that foreign ministers are supposed to head their countries' delegations. This, he said, casts an indisputable political mantle on the conference.

The US administration, most visibly during US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's tour of the region last month, has largely supported Qatar, and called on all Arab states to attend.

But said one Egyptian diplomat, "attending does not necessarily mean an acceleration of the concept of regional economic cooperation."

Despite opposition by the Arab countries to promoting regional economic cooperation at a time of political crisis in the peace process, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres is trying to keep the concept alive.

Peres, who is seen as being the man behind the idea of the "new Middle East", inaugurated the Peres Centre for Peace last week. The centre focuses mainly on boosting economic ties between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

To mark the inauguration of this Tel Aviv-based organisation, the PCP held a number of seminars that dealt with, or touched upon, the concept of regional cooperation.

Western and Israeli officials and businessmen, participating in the centre's seminars, argued that business between Arabs and Israelis should be promoted irrespective of the pace of the peace process.

The argument they presented was based on the idea that "at moments when the peace process lags, economic cooperation can strengthen" relations among the countries of the region which... would "never go to war" if they have joint interests.

The concept of "privatising peace" also has supporters in the Arab camp. One Saudi businessman was quoted in the PCP seminars as telling Israeli and US counterparts that "Politics are stupid. Let us businessmen find solutions and bring peace to the region by making business."

One US official, in favour of separating the political and economic tracks, took this statement a step further, saying "that Arab businessmen want, in the worst way, to normalise the economy with the Israelis."

Breaking the link between economy and politics may be beneficial to Israel. According to US and Israeli officials, since the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles in 1993 the Israeli economy has recorded an obvious improvement.

This business first approach could also be an acceptable line for some of the oil-rich Arab states which are not directly linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

But for those parties with a vested interest in the process such as the Palestinians, whose economy, according to World Bank figures, has gone from bad to worse since the declaration was signed, this separation of interests is unacceptable.

Even during the PCP inauguration celebrations, some of the participants stressed that strengthening the Palestinian economy is a must for any meaningful or lasting economic cooperation.

"The Palestinian economy is in deep trouble. And if the peace process is to develop, the Palestinian economy cannot be left the way it is because [in its current shape] the Palestinian economy will help neither peace nor regional cooperation," said US economist Stanley Fischer.

However, the economy alone cannot drive the peace process, said Joseph Saba, director of the World Bank projects in the Palestinian self-rule areas.

In comparison to its neighbouring Arab states, "Israel has made enormous gains from peace," he said.

Cabinet boosts privatisation

The privatisation programme received a boost this week as the government approved another group of companies for sale, writes Gamal Essam El-Din

Businessmen are full of anticipation at the prospect of making more money as the Cabinet Privatisation Committee (CPC) this week announced a new privatisation initiative, which will increase the number of privatised companies from 76 to 106.

The CPC's decision, which gives the green light for the floating of the shares of 30 public sector companies on the stock market over the next two months, also calls for the privatisation of another 50 companies in 1998.

Included in the list of 30 companies to be privatised by this December are a number of "firsts" for the government — seven public sector port service companies. The remaining 23 were previously approved for privatisation by the CPC.

According to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, privatising the port service companies is designed to encourage competition and to improve port services.

The seven port service companies include Abu Simbel Shipping Agencies, the Egyptian Company for Maritime Transport (MARTRANS), the United Arab Stevedoring Company, Canal Shipping Agencies, Memphis Shipping Agencies, the Egyptian Marine Supply and Contracting Company, and the Egyptian Shipbuilding and Repair Company.

The 50 companies slated for privatisation in 1998 include another 35 "first timers", 15 state-owned foreign trade companies and 20 hotels.

The CPC also approved an offer submitted by Philips International (Holland) for divesting its 50 per cent contribution in the Egyptian El-Nasr Electrical and Electronic Apparatus Company. The Dutch company's stake in ENEEAC is estimated at LE12.9 million.

The new privatisation initiative raised new hopes in business and stock market community, who have argued that Egypt's privatisation programme has been moving at a snail's pace so far.

The criticism has also come from legislative circles. Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid, whose ministry is responsible for moving the privatisation process along, this week faced a group of rowdy parliamentarians who charged that the government is becoming increasingly indecisive when it comes to privatising state-run firms.

MPs, in a meeting organised by the People's Assembly's Planning and Budgetary Committee, said that privatising state-run firms, especially in the milling and food industries sectors, has been drawn out for months, and the government seems hesitant to relinquish its hold on companies it had already listed for sale.

Ebeid has been quick to respond, saying that the pace of privatisation is based on President Hosni Mubarak's "instructions that this programme should be comprehensive, balanced and endorsed by all concerned state agencies."

More clearly stated, Ebeid said that differences between his ministry and the Central Auditing Agency (CAA) in valuing the shares of the companies listed for privatisation have been behind the lack of progress in the programme.

Ebeid listed Delta Sugar as an example. The company was slated for privatisation with its shares to go for LE400. But when the CAA learned that a new production line was being set up, the privatisation was delayed because the new line could increase the share price to LE720, he said.

"But we are working in full coordination, and are taking the CAA's remarks into account," said Ebeid.

Ebeid also explained that since he took office in 1993, he has been able to reduce the number of public sector loss-making companies from 108, out of a total 314, to the current level of 83.

"In 1999, I will be able to bail out all these companies... and, in the process... liquidate between eight to 10 companies which are a lost cause because of their huge debts to banks," Ebeid said.

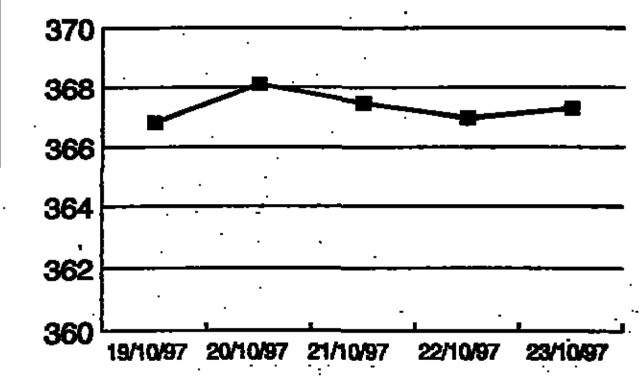
But even if the pace of privatisation has been slow, the revenue from the sales has not been slim. Proceeds from the sale of 76 companies so far have netted LE5.9 billion.

The CPC, in its meeting this week, agreed that LE2.5 billion of these proceeds would be set aside to settle the debts of 83 loss-making companies and to finance early retirement programmes for their employees.

By 1999, all the proceeds from privatisation will be assumed by the state budget, and all the debts will be settled, he said.

Market report

GMI inches up



FOLLOWING two weeks of decline, the General Market Index inched up by 0.35 points to settle at 366.94 for the week ending 23 October. Market turnover, however, dropped from LE314 million to LE265 million.

The increase, said market analysts, indicated that the Egyptian market was not affected by the Hong Kong market crash, which caused a panic in European capital markets.

In trading on the Egyptian exchange this week, subscriptions for shares of Industrial and Engineering Enterprises closed. The company had offered LE324 million in shares, representing 90 per cent of its equity. The subscription was four-times over-subscribed, but has not yet been allotted to buyers.

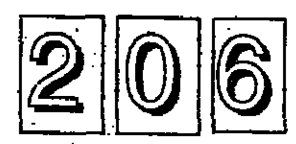
El-Watani Bank of Egypt's bid to offer shares to increase its capital aimed to whet the appetite of investors, but fell short of its target. The bank plans to offer 3.2 million shares, 1.18 million of which will be earmarked for its current shareholders. The bank's stock fell by 8.13 per cent as some investors sold their holdings given that the planned increase in capital will result in a future decrease in dividends.

On the list of gainers was El-Wadi Agricultural Exports, whose stock rocketed up by 210 per cent to level off at LE31.

In all, the shares of 59 companies increased in value, 63 decreased and 32 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



The plight of Egyptian peasants was only too apparent in the early years of this century, with little protection from extortionate interest rates, financial ruin and dispossession available. Dr Yunan Labib Rizk charts *Al-Ahram's* campaign to establish farmers' syndicates which attempted to free the *fellahin* from at least some of their shackles of poverty and exploitation


Illustration by: Makram Henein

"The men in the blue *galabiyas*" was a term the British High Commissioner Lord Cromer and other foreign observers applied to the Egyptian farmers, or *fallahin* — but only a particular segment of the *fallahin*. It did not refer to the middle scale landowners who rarely worked the land with their own hands and who therefore would not wear the customary apparel of the men who toiled on the land. The latter could afford to wear *galabiyas* of coloured cloth and even with increasing frequency, Western-style clothes that had begun to influence fashion among certain sectors of the countryside. Nor was the term used to describe the indigent day labourers and migrant farm hands whose threadbare and tattered clothes would hardly have been discernible as blue.

Rather, "the men in the blue *galabiyas*" denoted the greater portion of the rural populace: the small landed farmers who were very much the object of the attention of the British authorities. According to Cromer's annual report for 1905, of the approximately 109,000 Egyptian landholders, 94,000, or more than 86 per cent, owned less than five feddans per family. This was the class which wore cotton *galabiyas* dyed with indigo and this, too, was the class upon which the British authorities pinned their economic policy: to turn Egypt into an enormous cotton plantation for the British textile industry.

In her study *Social Developments in Rural Egypt before the 1919 Revolution*, Dr Fatma Alameddin Abdel-Wahed noted that the British authorities had taken numerous measures to ease the burdens on the Egyptian peasant, abolishing whipping, curbing corvée labour and reducing taxes. Nevertheless little was done to protect them and their possessions from the talons of foreign usurers, a perpetual scourge that plagued them in the best of times, but in years of cotton worm epidemic or economic slump would dispossess them of their land and turn thousands into migrant labourers, the most impoverished class of the Egyptian countryside.

The economic depression of 1907 brought one such year. In its 7 July edition, *Al-Ahram* bemoaned the ill fortune of the Egyptian peasant, who "in order to work his land and sell his crops, must rely on the money he is able to procure from others. The poor winter crop bodes ominous for a similar summer season, during which he depends on the proceeds from the cotton crop to pay his taxes to the government and to recultivate his land. Many report that already the farmer is compelled to borrow at 150 per cent interest." Clearly the Egyptian *fellah* was caught in a vicious circle, the ultimate end of which was bankruptcy and the forfeiture of all or part of his land. Several months later, *Al-Ahram* made this fate poignantly tangible to its readers. Reporting on the decision of the Agrarian Bank to sell 16,000 feddans of land, forfeited precisely from the class of farmers that the bank had originally been established to help, the newspaper implores, "Are you not stunned by this enormous number? Does your heart not ache to see the property of the farmer, his sole source of livelihood and the hope for the revival of the Egyptian nation, go to the wealthy and to foreign financiers?"

A solution to the farmers' plight had to be found. Against this background, *Al-Ahram* spearheaded the campaign to establish "farmers' syndicates." It was a campaign that marked the beginnings of the cooperative movement in Egypt.

Al-Ahram launched its campaign on 2 March 1909 in an article entitled, "Farmers' syndicates: how they can help the farmers and their moral, economic and political implications." Such organisations, *Al-Ahram* pleaded, were essential to alleviate the increasing burden of debt upon the farmers. "The people of Egypt are grieving. We cast about for a solid rock to keep us from drowning and we find that succor lies in agrarian development and increasing our agricultural production. If this is indeed the case, then any action that does not contribute toward improving the conditions of agriculture and easing the circumstances of the peasant is sterile and in vain." Farmers' syndicates proved the solution that was "inspired by the love for our nation and the aspiration for its progress."

The article made special mention of Prince Hussein Kamel, noted for his particular concern for agricultural development and who had "devoted years to studying such syndicates in Italy, France and Germany." Prince Kamel headed the Agrarian Society and commissioned Omar Bek Lutfi and Boughous Pasha Nubar to form a committee charged with "the planning and formation of farmers' syndicates."

Al-Ahram was delighted in the advantages the proposed project would bring to the *fellah*: "He will be able to borrow at only 2 per cent interest, whereas currently he has to borrow at rates of up to 100 per cent interest. It will also insure his livestock, which now he is forced to sell at the paltriest prices in order to avert the potential consequences of disease. These syndicates will also loan the price of fertiliser which farmers find so difficult to afford and yet which is so essential to restore the vitality to the land. In addition, they will set up economic and cooperative funds, instilling in the small farmer the sense of communal endeavour and establishing the seed of the spirit of cooperation among all members of the nation."

On 4 May 1909, *Al-Ahram* announced the "great news" that "the committee established by Prince Hussein Kamel for the purpose of founding farmers syndicates has received approval to found such syndicates and agricultural funds." As a token of delight and enthusiasm, the Egyptian newspapers featured numerous studies of their own on various aspects of the new project. The most important *Al-Ahram* article in this regard discussed "funds to assist the *fallahin*." The only institution ostensibly for that purpose in Egypt, the article said, was the Agrarian Bank which, however, "only lends the farmers paltry sums that only partially cover his needs," driving them to seek other sources for a loan. However, instead of having to put up their property, crops and other possessions as collateral, the agrarian funds offered another alternative. These funds, according to *Al-Ahram*, "grant loans to individuals in recognition of their good conscience and avoid the contractual small print, material pledges, constraints against property and court orders, all of which require extremely time-consuming procedures and are extremely off-putting." A second advantage of these funds, continues *Al-Ahram*, is that "their loans are given on a short term basis, because their purpose is not to facilitate the purchase of land, but rather to help the farmers meet their immediate expenses for fertilisers and seed and such like so as to assist them in the process of cultivation and increasing their yield. As these short term loans are for periods of up to three months, farmers are able to pay back their debts from the proceeds from their crops. In this manner, they can dispense with having to resort to usurers and, more importantly, they obtain their financial needs quickly, at less cost and without risking their land or property."

Shortly after this article, *Al-Ahram*'s Editor-in-Chief Daoud Barakat succeeding in securing an interview with Prince Kamel, during which the prince said the Egyptian peasant was too heavily dependent on the government: "Farmers think that fighting the cotton worm is the government's job alone. They think that it is the government that benefits from this labour, rather than themselves, and that, therefore, it is a form of slavery. However, farmers' syndicates and farmers' committees would help the farmers' understand that the cotton worm is the enemy of all the Egyptian people." He also asserted that it was the government's responsibility to help in the establishment of these syndicates, "so that our country might reap the fruit of this noble objective and earn, via the syndicates, what other civilisations have earned."

At the same time, however, there was growing speculation as to the seriousness of the government's intention to establish these syndicates. There was a lot of talk about the proposed syndicate law, complained one letter to the editor, "but the government has taken no action up to now." *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Beni Suef asks rhetorically, "Does Prime Minister Butros Ghali not wish to adorn his ministry with the glory that would accrue from this noble act? Does he not aspire to be commemorated in history as the man under whose government farmers syndicates came into being?" Patience was wearing thin. Some readers complained that the cause was not receiving sufficient attention in the national press. Sayyid Ghazi from Gharbiya wrote to *Al-Ahram* to thank it for its dedication and to ask the other newspaper owners "to set aside your differences, if only for a day, in order to dedicate the columns of your newspapers to the cause of agricultural advancement. Our country is not the mineral rich Transvaal, nor a wealthy mercantile country such as Great Britain."

The most cogent explanation for the government's foot-dragging was that the project was championed by the Nationalist Party leader Omar Bek Lutfi. Government officials and British authorities in particular feared that the farmers syndicates were the National Party's Trojan Horse designed to spread its influence to the Egyptian countryside. The writings of the British High Commissioner confirm that there was little to fear as long as the Nationalist Movement remained confined to the cities, but nevertheless the comissioner instructed his consultants in the directorate capitals to ascertain that the Nationalist Party "effendis and rabble-rousers" had not infiltrated into the villages.

Ultimately government resistance was overcome, and in April 1910, Omar Bek Lutfi received government approval for the establishment of the Cooperative Commercial Finance Company in Cairo. The first action of this company was to found Egypt's first farmers' syndicate in Shubra El-Namla in Gharbiya. In a speech to the Higher Schools Club, published in *Al-Ahram* on 25 May 1910, Omar Lutfi outlined the aims of the syndicate which, he said, would assist its members in obtaining seed, fertiliser, livestock and all other materials and equipment necessary for agricultural production and irrigation. In addition, it would facilitate the sale of produce and provide the latest information on prices in the local and international markets, construct warehouses, silos and other such storage facilities, establish laboratories and cotton gins and would sponsor lectures and experimental projects for the benefit of its members. Finally, it would offer its members loans on the condition that the money was allocated solely for agricultural purposes and would also open savings accounts for its members.

Only a month later, on 6 June of that year, *Al-Ahram* announced the founding of the second farmers syndicate in Imbaba, five days later a third syndicate was founded in Beni Suef and within four years 23 farmers' syndicates had been established throughout Egypt. Unfortunately, the death of Omar Lutfi in 1911 took some of the impetus away from the movement. It would be some time before the "men in the blue *galabiyas*" would see an equally ardent champion of their cause.

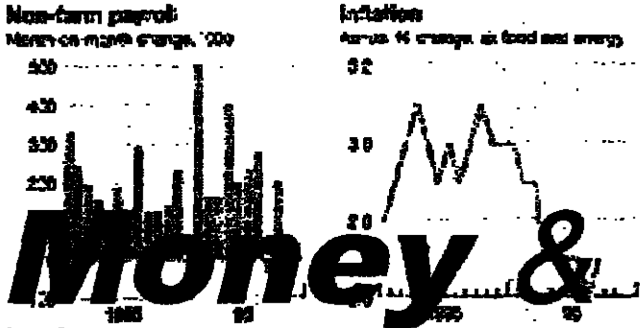
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Businessman paid tribute

DURING the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce's reception on the occasion of its 75th anniversary, held under the patronage of Dr Kamal El-Ganzouri, the prestigious Order of Merit of the chamber was bestowed upon Mr Mustafa Kamal, one of the most senior members of the chamber, in recognition of his accomplishments in business over the past 20 years.

Kamal, a well-known figure in the local business scene, has received numerous awards from international organisations for his distinguished efforts in promoting Egyptian commerce and trade.



Workers' city to be established

MOHAMED Abdel-Salam El-Mahgoub, governor of Alexandria, and Dr Hussein El-Gamal, secretary-general of the Social Development Fund, signed an agreement to establish a workers' city in El-Manshiyat El-Gedida. The city will contain 110 small industries providing 500 job opportunities through loans from the Fund valued at LE5 million, with LE250 thousand in grants.

The governor stated that the projects will be implemented in units which the governorate has established in El-Manshiyat El-Gedida, done through a local social development association with support and supervision from the governorate.

Faisal Islamic Bank holds extraordinary general assembly

LAST 17th of October witnessed the convening of both an ordinary and extraordinary general assembly for shareholders of Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt, headed by Chairman of the Board Prince Mohamed Al-Faisal Al Saud.

The ordinary general assembly approved the Bank's budget report and the *Zakat* fund budget report for the fiscal year 1417AH, ending on 7 May 1997.

The business of the extraordinary general assembly concluded with an agreement to amend the text of sections 7 and 12 of the Bank's charter, removing restrictions stipulating that the Egyptian side's capital must be no less than 51 per cent of the total capital of the bank. It was likewise agreed to implement the decision to increase the Bank's issued capital by $50 million, to reach a total $150 million. To cover these funds, closed subscriptions would be available to the Bank's existing shareholders.

Faisal explained that throughout the past year, the Bank has continued advancing its social and economic development policies, the bank's prime aim, by collecting the necessary funds to be channeled throughout different areas of economic activity, with special emphasis in the national production sector.


Prince Mohamed Al-Faisal


Abdel-Hamid Abu Moussa

The bank's prevailing policy with the *Zakat* fund, explained Faisal, is geared towards establishing and developing companies until they become profit-making enterprises. The Bank then places its shares for sale to either a single anchor investor or via the stock market.

Faisal indicated that the *Zakat* fund is also aimed at building a sound social infrastructure through resources of some LE51 million collected in accordance with Islamic law. Funds are given to needy students and are also employed in the construction of charitable projects, such as dormitories and hospitals. He further added that the fund is also used to boost the capabilities of recipients, providing them with vocational training through the Bank's vocational training centre located in Zeitoun. Thus, the importance of the fund is not only limited to offering assistance and support, but rather, includes training and human resource development.

Regarding figures and results gained during 1417AH (ending May 1997), Mr. Abdel-Hamid Abu Moussa, governor of the bank, explained that the volume of transactions rose to LE6177 million at the end of the previous year as compared to LE6428 million at the end of 1417AH, an increase of LE250 million or 4.1 per cent. Total deposits reached a level of LE423 million, an increase of LE55 million over what was realised at the end of the prior fiscal year, equaling a growth of 15.1 per cent. General gains reached LE236.5 million, an increase of LE44.6 million over what was gained at the end of 1416AH, an increase of 14 per cent. Within this context, Moussa said that customer deposits reached a total of LE5169.5 million at the end of the previous year, an increase of 1.5 per cent, while the number of accounts reached 450 thousand, reflecting the trust placed in the bank. Likewise, investment capital has reached an equivalent of LE5626.4 million, an increase of 3.7 per cent over the last fiscal year.

NBE Credit Division services

AS THE Egyptian economy currently undergoes a transitional period via adopting market mechanisms and assigning a greater role to the private sector; the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) seeks through its continuous efforts in fostering economic reform policies, to create an investment-friendly environment and invigorate the capital market. In this vein, the Bank is eager to provide, via its Credit Division, the necessary services and facilities that would eradicate any possible obstructions to new or expanding projects by offering the following:

— Extending soft term loans for new and expanding projects. The Division also advises clients on the most suitable financing methods in funding their projects with the lowest possible costs (via using capital or loans), hence achieving better financial results.

— Solving the problems faced by viable projects via:

a) Granting longer grace periods to large scale projects (i.e. large industrial projects) whose nature inevitable leads to cash deficit in their initial years of operation, hence giving them a chance to improve their financial situation.

b) Extending the maturity date of loan instalments for projects depending basically on credit facilities.

c) Providing clients with short and medium term loans for projects liable to suffer cash deficit due to capital injection or replacement activities.

— Providing clients with sound marketing, administrative and financial consultations, based on the expertise of highly-qualified professionals in the credit field. For instance, the Division determines the minimum return to be obtained from a tourist project managed by a specialised company, i.e. the return that is commensurate with the cost and size of the project. The Division also determines the maximum fees charged by companies managing tourist projects.

— Preparing feasibility studies for new or expanding projects, in addition to granting concessionary loans to export-oriented projects.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 19-23 October 1997

Closing On 23/10/97 397.78 Points

The NBE Index has decreased 0.79 points to register 397.78 points for the week ending 23/10/1997 against 398.57 points for the previous week ending 16/10/1997.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Changes %
Credit Int. d'Egypte	-9.7
El-Watani Bank of Egypt	-8.1
Alexandria Iron and Steel Co.	-4.5
The Arab Pharmaceutical Co.	-2.6

Company	Changes %
Misr Indust. Hoteliere Co	+7.7
El-Nile Match Co.	+5
Cairo Housing and Development Co.	+4.1
Western and Eastern Delta Flour Mills Co.	+2.1

Needless to reiterate that NBE's financing services come in line with the Bank's leading position among the Egyptian banking system and its constant endeavours to boost and stimulate economic development in Egypt.

6th Artificial Intelligence Conference to be held simultaneously with ACITEX

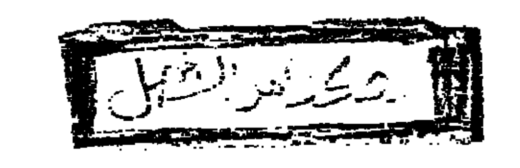
The Cairo International Conference Centre is world-renowned for its ability to accommodate important conferences, including the forthcoming Artificial Intelligence Conference and the Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX), both of which will be held from 18-21 February 1998.

The proceedings of the conference will take place in Press Hall 1 of the Centre, while the 4 smaller halls will be devoted for panels and workshops for companies, in addition to a cafeteria where participants and rest and exchange views and ideas in a comfortable atmosphere. The new halls of the conference centre will have plenty of room for companies to set up their booths, and will allow for ample freedom of movement.

Dr. Ebadah Sirhan, head of the Faculty of Computer Science, said that the 6th Artificial Intelligence Conference will cover numerous topics in the field, including, expert systems, photo processing, word processing, screen systems, machine translation, natural languages, robotics, telecommunications, administration, intelligent systems in education and more, in an effort to find solutions to today's problems.

As for ACITEX, which will be held simultaneously with the Artificial Intelligence Conference, it is being organised to serve as a forum for international contact with both new and well-established computer companies from all over the world. Of importance is the fact that representatives from international computer exhibitions will be present to exchange expertise. ACITEX will be a true occasion to learn about the latest developments in the field of computers and information technology.


The Cairo International Conference Centre





MENA IV: Controlling chaos

Among the possible benefits of boycotting the conference in Doha, writes Fawzi Mansour, is the message that the Arabs can be pushed just so far

The duplicity, deceptiveness and partiality of American official pronouncements on Middle East issues have become proverbial. I am not sure, however, into which of these categories — if any — we may fit the pronouncements attributed to US Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat in his meeting of Thursday 16 October with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Mr Eizenstat ended his pronouncements with what I consider to be a veiled warning. In order to be effective, warnings need to acquire credibility. It is with this credibility that I am mainly concerned in the present article.

In *Al-Ahram Weekly* (16-22 October 1997), Mr Eizenstat maintained that "it is important to divorce political considerations from an economic conference...," and added that "investors want a sense of certainly and stability and the notion that the political process is not going to be an impediment to doing business here." The conference, he told Minister Moussa, will send a signal that "the Middle East is again open for business, even at a time of difficult political circumstances."

The notion that economic considerations can be divorced from political ones is pure nonsense: the very name of the science which deals with economic matters was, for well over a century, "political economy". It has retained that name up to the present in many universities worldwide. Even in those faculties which opted for the shorter name 'economics', the idea that practical economics — as distinct from pure theory — can be separated from the political framework and political relations is unthinkable when applied to internal economic affairs, and becomes quite laughable if it is extended to international economic relations.

In any case, there is no need to appeal to academia in connection with the proposed Doha conference on Middle East and North Africa economic cooperation (MENA IV): it is well known that its predecessors were imposed by the US on Arab states, essentially under the pretext that it was necessary to give Israel a sizeable 'carrot' in order to induce it to cede to the Palestinians part of the internationally recognised rights usurped from them.

According to Arab governments participating in the game, and to some distinguished Arab economists, that carrot essentially meant the integration of Israel into the Middle East economy, allegedly to the benefit of all participating parties. For others, no less distinguished, probably more numerous and certainly less connected with Arab governments and American-dominated international organisations, the main American-Israeli aim of these conferences was to pave the way for Israel to become the hegemonic economic power in the region: its regional military hegemony having already been assured, and its political hegemony steadily advancing, in both cases thanks to unconditional US support, on the one hand, and on the other to the failure of the Arab states and peoples, for various well-known reasons, to stand up effectively to that fateful challenge.

Mr Eizenstat is exerting pressure on Arab states to attend the Doha conference at a time when the Israel policy of annexation, building militarised Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands, starving the trapped Palestinians of work and of their own rightful economic resources, and demolishing their homes, have reached unprecedented heights; and when, moreover, the present Israeli prime minister is throwing to the wind agreements bearing his signature and that of his predecessors. By doing that Mr Eizenstat is literally asking the Arabs to forgo the main reward — meagre as it is — for taking Israel, economically speaking, to their bosom, and to give away one of the few cards left in Arab hands — again, in this time of maximum weakness — to salvage the little they can of what is left of the Palestinian's destroyed and lost homeland.

I will limit myself here essentially to discussing Mr Eizenstat's contention that the Arab states will forgo certain alleged benefits if they choose to absent themselves from the Doha conference. This is because I believe that, alongside direct political pressure, threats to withhold "economic aid" and hints of less than enthusiastic support for the ruling regimes, the purely economic argument that continuing with the "economic process" regardless of what happens on the political front will bring definite tangible benefits, has a special appeal not only to certain Arab governments, but also to some circles within Arab business communities. The economic benefits which they seem to be most concerned about are foreign investment and whatever goes with it. Hence Mr Eizenstat's emphasis on the relation between holding the conference and the flow of foreign investment.

Mr Eizenstat seems to assume that security and stability will be assured to foreign investors merely if the MENA IV conference is held, irrespective of what happens on the political front. This is a strange assumption, to say the least. It literally translates as follows: the Arab peoples everywhere, and more especially the Palestinians, will continue to accept whatever Israel metes out to them. We have seen above examples of this treatment, but more and worse will be forthcoming if the Arab governments follow Mr. Eizenstat's advice and attend the conference, for the effective signal such attendance will give is the one which Mr Netanyahu will receive: you can do as you like to the Arabs, especially the Palestinians, without fearing even the passive gesture of boycotting a fraternisation conference.

Alternatively, he and his American protagonists may not have such a serene view of Arab peoples' capacity to continuously take injuries and insults lying down, but they rely on the 'understanding', 'moderation' and cooperation' of Arab governments and the Palestinian Authority to ruthlessly quell any manifestations of protest or rebellion. Obviously, in the short run this may create a secure and stable environment for American capital — there are many precedents for that, especially in Latin America. This is not just an innocent short-term and short-sighted policy, it may be a fully considered, deliberate, long-term strategy. It even has a special name, the 'strategy of controlled chaos'. Many of our political scientists and commentators may not have heard of it: they never came across it in American textbooks and learned articles on international politics. But this does not make the term any less scientific.

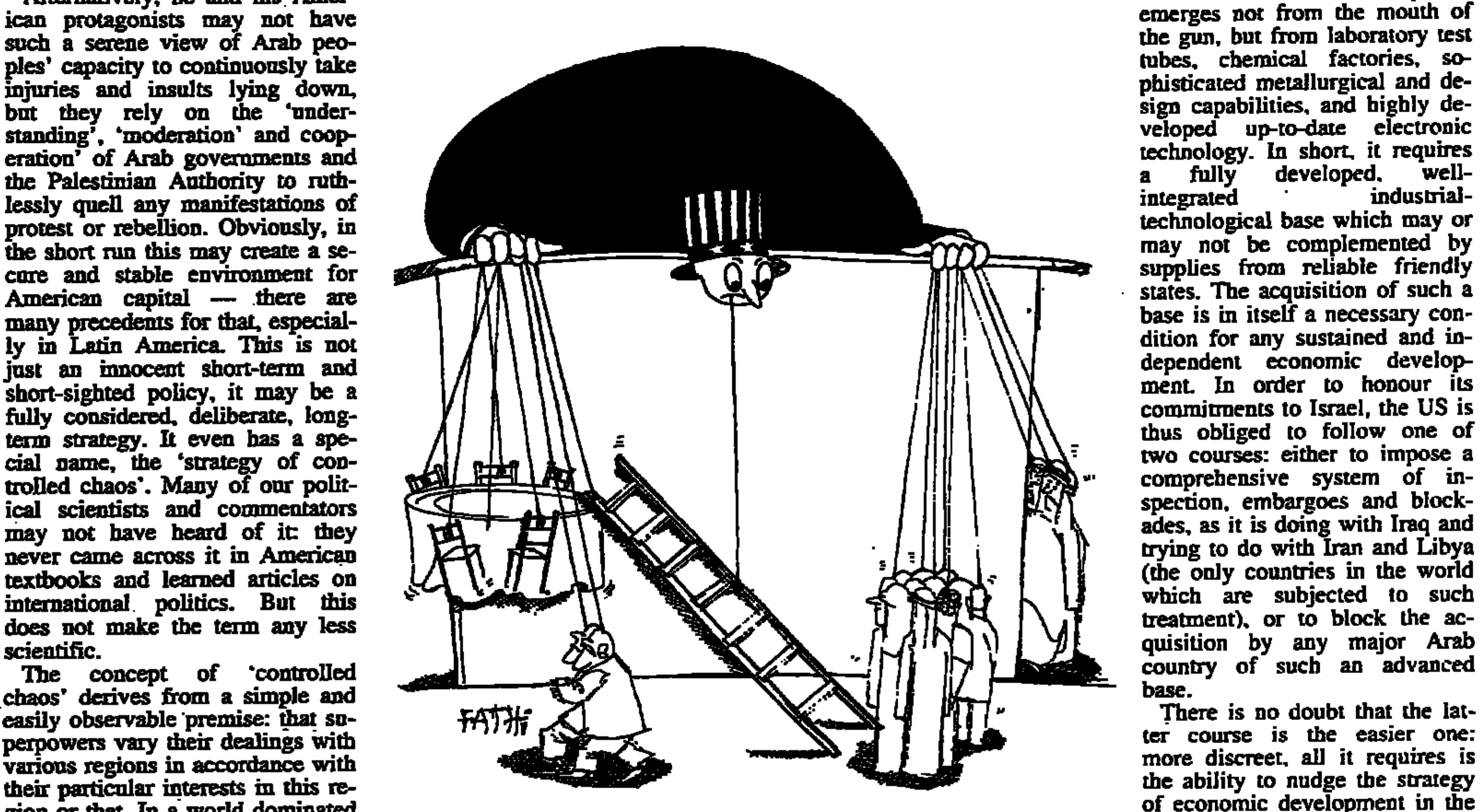
The concept of 'controlled chaos' derives from a simple and easily observable premise: that superpowers vary their dealings with various regions in accordance with their particular interests in this region or that. In a world dominated by one superpower, particularly one infused with the ideology of violence, supremacy and expansionism, maintaining at whatever cost that status becomes a binding world policy. The real world economic order it establishes, far from being an order which assures freedom, security and development for all, is an order which applies even more ruthlessly than before the principles of differentiating — and varying with time — its mode of dealing with various regions in accordance with the way they fit in with its overall design for maintaining supremacy. Thus at one time it was US strategy to build up the economic power of Western Europe and Japan as counterweights to the expanding power of the Soviet Union, or that of South Korea against North Korea and the rest of the famous four tigers — Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore — as sentinels against communist China. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union as the archenemy, the increasing might of Western Europe and Japan, and competition from other East and Southeast Asian countries, that strategy is inexorably edging towards containment and confrontation rather than cooperation, whatever may be the rules of the game, as exemplified by the World Trade Organisation, and though the weapons used in this confrontation may be qualitatively different from those used against the Soviet Union.

With regard to the Arab Middle East as a whole or any of its major countries, there was never any question of building up its economic power or putting it on a real development path, for this necessarily meant building up an integrated industrial and technological base and enabling it to deal with the outside world on an equal footing. The enormous oil resources of the Arab Middle East, its unique geographical location and the potential economic, political and military might it is capable of acquiring tempts any superpower bent on dominating the world to lay its hands on it. I need not labour these points here. Nor is it possible, in the space available, to follow step by step the various policies which the US adopted to implement this negative strategy of 'internal' containment, or forced stunting. In an age where people everywhere aspire to a decent standard of living, where the Arabs are manifestly denied a chance for sustainable development, this strategy inevitably leads to pitting Arabs against their subservient rulers, rulers against neighbouring rulers, and majorities and minorities against one another. This is what I call controlled chaos: chaos because that is what results from stunted development, not to speak of deliberate foreign intelligence services' machinations, but controlled because measures and dispositions are taken to safeguard the superpower's position and interests.

I am not in the least unaware of the fundamental weaknesses which disable all Arab societies. But I maintain that the foreign factor plays, in various ways, apparent and not so apparent, a determining role in frustrating Arab peoples' efforts to overcome their initial historically-conditioned disabilities. Naturally, the strategy of controlled chaos takes other manifestations in Africa and parts of Latin America, the two other regions where it is also imposed.

That strategy would have been applied to the Arab world, Israel or no Israel. The creation of Israel, however, was conceived from the beginning as an essential part of it, and Israel never failed to oblige. For other extraneous reasons relating to the strength of the Zionist lobby in the US and the close alliance between American and Zionist capital, the existence of Israel also gave further important motivations for enforcing that strategy.

The American commitment to an Israel militarily stronger than all its Arab neighbours put together has become almost as sacrosanct to every successive president as the vow to respect the American Constitution. Under President Clinton that commitment was recently spelt out — in his 1996 agreement with Prime Minister Peres — to include US-Israeli coordination against such risks as land-to-land missiles, traditional developed weaponry, non-traditional weaponry, "terrorism", the exchange of intelligence, and the undertaking to establish a regional defence capability against 'terrorism' and long-range missiles in the Middle East. In short, it is an all-inclusive, non-traditional military alliance. It is not merely defensive, but active too, acting upstream in the sense that it endeavours to prevent Arab countries from acquiring such weapons, either from abroad or by developing internal capabilities.



In modern times, power emerges not from the mouth of the gun, but from laboratory test tubes, chemical factories, sophisticated metallurgical and design capabilities, and highly developed up-to-date electronic technology. In short, it requires a fully developed, well-integrated industrial-technological base which may or may not be complemented by supplies from reliable friendly states. The acquisition of such a base is in itself a necessary condition for any sustained and independent economic development. In order to honour its commitments to Israel, the US is thus obliged to follow one of two courses: either to impose a comprehensive system of inspection, embargoes and blockades, as it is doing with Iraq and trying to do with Iran and Libya (the only countries in the world which are subjected to such treatment), or to block the acquisition by any major Arab country of such an advanced base.

There is no doubt that the latter course is the easier one: more discreet, all it requires is the ability to nudge the strategy of economic development in the concerned Arab country in this or that direction. The US already possesses national and international tools for doing just that, and does not hesitate to use them. For example, under the combined influence of American economic aid and international economic institutions, and despite the market improvement in various, no doubt important, infrastructure projects, Egypt is now less poised to acquire such a base than it was, say, 20 years ago; the industrial and financial public sectors are being dismantled without being replaced — as was the case in all developed Asian countries — by clear policy guidelines and open or implicit policy measures ensuring the coordination and integration of private enterprise efforts in a way that encourages the creation of the required industrial-technological base. After more than two decades of foreign aid and economic 'advice', Egypt is more dependent now for its export earnings on four sources which leave it at the mercy of outside forces: tourism, remittances from expatriates, oil and the Suez Canal. The share in export revenues of industrial products and any commodities in international demand, such as cotton, has dwindled.

There is no sign from any quarter that the creation of an integrated, developed industrial-technological base is a recognised or even perceived national priority. Without such a base, there is no possibility, for a country like Egypt, of attaining sustained economic development; nor can its absence be compensated for under present world economic and political inequalities by the much touted advantages of so-called international economic cooperation.

It is pure nonsense, for reasons which I have explained in great detail elsewhere, to imagine that cooperation with the technically highly developed Israeli economy within the framework of the grand Middle East project — for which the successive MENAs are a vehicle — can make up for this fatal deficiency, not only because of the strategic power considerations I mentioned above, but also because such a cooperation between highly developed and underdeveloped economies is bound to reproduce and reinforce the type of economic dependency and inequality which obtain in the larger world economy, unless of course severe rectifying measures are agreed upon. This is theoretically unthinkable under present conditions, and the varying patterns of economic relations which Israel is attempting to build with various parts of the Arab world support this conclusion: virtual subjugation of the Palestinian economy and annexation of the Jordanian one; utilisation of the Gulf countries' surplus oil revenues and oil facilities for its own further development and, perhaps most important of all, striving to achieve domination over Egyptian finance and exports of goods and services which necessarily results in the stunted, unbalanced development of the only power that can stand up to Israel in the Arab world. For Egypt, of course, this can only lead to an aggravation of the problems of poverty, unemployment and internal strife — scoring a great success for the strategy of controlled chaos in a sensitive area.

What, on the other hand, will happen if the Arab countries boycott MENA IV? First, Egypt will align itself with the major Arab countries which have already decided not to attend or are waiting for Egypt to take the lead in this matter. Second, it will strengthen the will of the Palestinian people and leaders to resist, and lift some of them out of their present mood of despair. Third, it will give a clear message to Israel that it cannot have its cake and eat it — annex and subjugate and yet obtain Arab submission to its plans for economic domination. Fourth, it will send a definite message to those great powers which are already in a state of muted but inexorable mutiny against US hegemony and the irresponsibility of its international practices: that the Arabs — a vital link in the ongoing and future struggle — can be counted upon to say no to American designs, and hence that their friendship can be profitably cultivated. Capital and entrepreneurs belonging to those rival but cautious powers may be encouraged to enter an area which is being liberated from American domination.

What will the Americans do if the Arab states boycott MENA IV? Virtually nothing that can hurt the Arabs or the Arab states. They will foam at the mouth — that is, some congressional leaders and the Zionist American organisations. They are unlikely to make cuts in economic aid, for an objective cost-benefit analysis will make them realise that their aid, evaluated in terms of implementing their grand Middle East strategy, is one of their most rewarding investments. They will not even be able to threaten Arab regimes with the withdrawal of their various forms of support, for these regimes will be able, as never before, to count on the support and enthusiasm of their own peoples. Even those narrow circles of the entrepreneurial class who pin their hopes on the peripheral gains which may be reaped from acting as agents and partners to foreign and Israeli capital may be made to see that there are other ways, more honourable and dependable, for making profits. And it may just happen that the Americans themselves will see the Arabs can be pushed that far and no further — and act accordingly.

A conference for America

Those Arab countries which ultimately will go to Doha next month will do so only as a gesture to the US. But, wonders Gamil Mattar, does Washington appreciate the cost?



Over the past few months, my conviction has increased that it would have been possible to avoid the crisis, and its ramifications, of the fourth Middle East and North Africa economic conference (MENA IV), to be held in Doha in November. All governments and individuals with reservations against this conference should have spoken out. The media should have given it prime attention, since there is not the slightest doubt that public opinion in the Arab and Islamic world is against the conference, and will remain opposed to it even after it is over. Yet in spite of all the objections that might be voiced by leaders and the public in the Arab and Islamic worlds, I have not a second's doubt that the conference will convene at some level.

In all events, it would not be accurate to describe the forthcoming conference as a summit. The term summit only applies to those conferences in which most of the heads of delegations are heads of state, a characteristic which does not apply to any of the previous MENA conferences.

It is pointless, at this juncture, to reiterate the arguments that have been put forth in many Arab capitals against going to Doha. It is equally pointless to advocate attending or boycotting it, since the conference is going ahead regardless. Nor is it particularly significant whether it is held at the ministerial level or at the level of government and economic experts. What is important is that many delegations attend and return to their respective countries content. Some will be satisfied simply to have found a large turn-out, regardless of the level of officialdom that attended and regardless of what has been accomplished. Others will find a certain satisfaction in being able to say that they simply sent a token delegation, in order to convey the message to Washington that they do not challenge the dictates of the only global superpower, even if they attend at a level that carries no authority.

Of course, there is a third group that will not attend at all. Their message will be even more explicit. It will read: nothing fruitful can result from such conferences as long as the US is so one-sided, and as long as it uses such overwhelming force to enforce its prejudiced vision. Of course, this group will include parties who were not even on the guest list. They are certain to be the happiest of all since they know that American and Israeli arrogance must sooner or later play into the hands of those countries or ideological groups that are supposed to be blacklisted, penalised and ostracised from the Middle East's happy community.

I believe that the Doha conference will conclude with insipid results expressed in an insipid communiqué, with all sides showing understanding. The US, the government of Qatar and most of the participating states will be satisfied that the conference was held at all, while Syria and Lebanon, which have boycotted all previous MENA conferences and will boycott this one, will have been satisfied with the low level of representation, which they will consider a reflection of the success of their diplomatic efforts.

The only exception to these fortunate circumstances is to be found within the European Community, which tried to convene a similar conference in Morocco at the end of October, though including only those Arab countries overlooking the Mediterranean. It so happened, however, that the Moroccan government decided, suddenly and at the last moment, to postpone the conference. We have yet to discover whether Morocco will send a representative to Doha. If it does, it will only further support my contention that MENA IV lost all meaning before it began.

I suspect that, right now, not a few Arab capitals are engaging in intensive communications with the purpose of ensuring that nothing emerges from the conference to indicate that it has succeeded or accomplished anything substantive — that is, beyond the fact that it was convened. For the first time in quite a while, Arab governments have been both responsible and acutely sensitive toward the overwhelming body of public opinion in their countries against attending the conference. I feel, along with many others, including supporters of the conference, that, on this occasion, the Arab public has overcome much of its hesitancy and apathy. The feelings on the Arab street have alerted American officials and observers to the extent that they have prompted the US administration to relinquish certain conditions for the conference, not least of which is the high-profile level of attendance previously stipulated.

The Arab response is at once obvious and baffling. The Israeli government in the past months has done its utmost to turn Arab public opinion against it. Indeed, some observers have contended that Netanyahu himself would like the conference to fail because he opposes any Middle Eastern order comprising both Israel and the Arabs. How accurate this assessment is, it is difficult to say. Certainly, Netanyahu, like any other Israeli politician, would like to establish conduits over the borders into all Arab countries; on the condition, however, that these channels operate primarily in one direction: from Israel outwards, and only into Israel under the tightest controls.

The Israelis do not want to postpone Doha. What they do want is to Judaise Palestine and to throw the Arab world into disarray in the process. The most recent example of this behaviour is the assassination attempt against the Hamas leader in Amman, the scandal with a happy ending which confirmed Israel's right to resort to terrorism, cast Canada's credibility into doubt and reaffirmed the West's double standards wherever Israel is concerned.

The US administration has appeared no less eager to alienate Arab public opinion and, unwittingly or not, to push it further toward the brink of extremism. Most of the recent statements issued by Madeleine Albright, her official spokesman and her special envoy to the Middle East have been highly provocative. I find it difficult to determine precisely what is meant by their exhortation to the Arabs to "give a fresh look" at what constitutes a just solution. But certainly, for US officials to make this statement only a few days before MENA IV tells us that the US government is confident that the Arab governments invited to the conference will attend in spite of the general wrath against the US and Israel.

Still, I believe it was possible to avoid this debacle and its consequences. The Arab countries could have acted differently. They could have conveyed a message similar to that which the government of the host country conveyed. Qatar announced that, by hosting the conference, it wanted to reward the US for its efforts in promoting bilateral relations.

Many in the Arab world interpreted this statement to imply that Arab governments have alternatives to active participation, even if they feel they must attend. It is not difficult to predict a "silent" Arab participation, including side-line meetings with the US Secretary of State associated with a complete, or nearly complete, disregard for Israel. Delegations would have no decision-making or even negotiating authority.

Even so, I doubt that the US, for whose sake the Arab governments will be attending the conference, will be happy with its results. One can only hope, however, that the US appreciates the value of this participation, since for many Arab countries even to go to Doha is a great risk in light of the tenor of popular opposition to this conference.

The writer is the director of Arab Centre for Development and Futuristic Research.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Playing with fire

Even before they have begun, the Israeli-Palestinian talks scheduled to take place in Washington seemed doomed. Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy has expressed his dissatisfaction at not having been given a mandate for negotiations. But Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu still clings to the misguided notion that any peace in the region will be reached along lines dictated by Israel. This late in the game, Netanyahu's approach to peace should surprise none. And it has not.

For nearly one and a half years, Netanyahu has pursued the same extreme right-wing line, repeatedly accusing Arafat for allegedly violating the Oslo Accords with respect to the PA's obligations towards Israeli security. The hypocrisy is mind-boggling, since Netanyahu has made no secret of his determination to bury these accords. Netanyahu would like to see Arafat flaunt legality and basic human rights standards by waging an all-out war on Hamas, even as he himself goes and makes secret deals with Jordan's King Hussein to release the spiritual leader of the Islamist movement and scores of its members.

Only a total imbecile or a stooge in the pay of Netanyahu's bungling intelligence service would heed such urgings, which would have the ludicrous implication of making the PA look tougher on Hamas than the Likud government in Israel. Arafat is neither.

But if Netanyahu has been descending rapidly into that realm of near insanity which has long played host to similarly fanatical and power-crazed political leaders, what of the administration of Mr Clinton, standing at the helm of the sole superpower in the world?

Can it be that the past half decade has so dazzled the men in Washington as to blind them to the ramifications of their docile sniffing at Netanyahu's heels? Whatever the reasons, or motives, Washington is playing with fire — the same fire that Bibi fuels on a daily basis.

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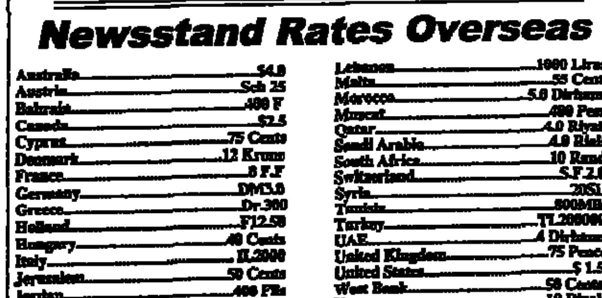
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Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals

US insistence, Arab interests

The idea of a Middle East market is increasingly irrelevant, writes **Essam Rifaat**. The Arab free market is where the future lies

Actions reflect intentions: this truism is nowhere clearer than in the critical situation in which King Hussein has placed Qatar today. On the eve of MENA II, held in Amman in October 1995, the prevailing understanding was that Cairo would be the venue for the following economic conference. But a few days before the conference began, the Jordanian media embarked on a campaign to propagate the idea that Qatar would host the following meeting. King Hussein did not even hesitate to back the idea, but finally a a compromise between the two ideas was sought. It was therefore decided that Egypt would host MENA III, while Qatar would host the 1997, MENA IV.

This manoeuvre seems to have put Qatar in the critical situation in which it finds itself today. While Qatar has prepared for the meeting, it is in a difficult position, best expressed by a Qatari official who declared in Beirut that "Qatar welcomes all the Arab brethren who will attend, as well as all those who will not!"

A commendable attitude indeed. But hopefully, the convening of the conference and issues such as the level of representation, and participation or the lack thereof, will not be used to fragment the Arab front. Hopefully, too, Qatar will fully understand the factors motivating those Arab countries which choose not to attend.

The question here, however, is whether Egypt will go to Doha or not. When will Cairo decide? And if it decides to attend, who will it send?

Egypt's position on the conference in Doha, and its decision to participate or not, will be declared only a few hours before the meeting takes place. While there are many reasons for postponing the decision to the last minute, perhaps the most compelling is the need to take into account all the circumstances that may arise.

The conference in Qatar is one in a series of meetings to consolidate cooperation in the Middle East among businessmen. It has never been conceived as a meeting for officials at any level, and is certainly not a summit. During the Cairo session last year, we refused to allow discussions and communications to dwell on political issues. Today, wiser by three MENA conventions, we need to pose a question: has Arab-Israeli trade increased in volume or expanded into new areas? The answer: certainly not.

The conference in Doha has only symbolic value: namely, to revive the idea of cooperation in the Middle East. The conference also fulfils the US's desire to show the world that the peace process is still moving despite all the obstacles.

Before taking any decision, we must wait and see how things will develop, and if there are good reasons to be optimistic about the outcome of the meeting for Egypt, for Arab businessmen or for peace in the region.

A realistic assessment of the situation shows that now is not the right time for such meetings, since no true progress has been made in the peace process. It would be wise to postpone the entire event until a more propitious time; but not everyone agrees with this assessment. It is no secret that certain Arab countries implied at previous meetings, and particularly at the Amman conference, that Egypt was pressuring other countries to refrain from participating. While Egypt's leading role is incontestable, it is hardly fair to say that it is preventing others from exercising their free will.

Egypt's position will be determined in light of developments in the peace process between now and the date of the conference. Such developments will give Egypt objective grounds for its decision. Each Arab state, however, is free to decide whether participation is in its own best interest.

The economic cooperation conferences being held in the Middle East raise the question of how useful these meetings are, whose interests they serve, and who benefits from them. It is difficult to ignore the fact that transnational corporations derive the greatest benefit from such meetings. But have these meetings helped Arab businessmen cooperate with Israel? This is a question we must pose within the framework of nationalism. Furthermore, what is the effect of such cooperation on the domestic interests of the Palestinian people, and the business community in particular?

Finally, where do we go after Doha? Who will host the following session — if such a session is ever convened? Netanyahu has repeatedly asserted his contempt for cooperation in the Middle East framework. According to him, this framework was a ploy dreamed up by Peres.

I also believe that so-called Middle-Easternism has died. We need to focus on Arab interests. The Arab free market is scheduled to come into being during the new year — only a few months away.

The writer is editor- in- chief of the weekly economic magazine, Al-Ahram Al-Iktissadi, *issued by Al-Ahram.*

Primakov in Cairo

Although an old hand in the region, Primakov's present visit to the Middle East confronts him with new types of challenges. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses the problematic

During his recent trip to Moscow, President Mubarak gently chided his Russian host for not paying enough attention to the Middle East. Admitting the truth of the accusation, President Yeltsin promised to make amends. In Cairo to make good on that promise is Russia's Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. The ideal person to undertake such a task, Primakov knows Egypt well. For many years he lived and worked in Cairo as the *Pravda* correspondent, and counts many Egyptians among his friends. Fluent in Arabic, he developed a deep understanding of Egypt, cultural, political, even, I would say, ideological. As such, he can plead Egypt's case better than anyone else before Russian public opinion, which is today very different from what it was in the past.

In subjective, personal, terms, then, the task with which he has been entrusted is in very good hands. But what of its objective dimensions? Here we should try and place Russia's relations with the region in a historical perspective. A question worth asking is whether Moscow's interest in Egypt, and in the Middle East in general, was purely ideological, and hence doomed to disappear with the disappearance of communism; whether, in other words, the relationship between the two countries was devoid of any other considerations, specifically, of any national or geopolitical interests.

Actually, Cairo and Moscow did not always enjoy a privileged relationship. In fact, it was not until 1942 that they established diplomatic relations, the year the Battle of Stalingrad forced Britain to relax its uncompromising enmity to its Soviet ally. In 1947, when Egypt called for the withdrawal of British troops from its territory, the Soviet representative in the Security Council at the time, Andrei Gromyko, strongly supported the Egyptian position. In 1956 came Bulganin's famous ultimatum in support of Egypt against the tripartite aggression. Moscow crowned its support for Egypt with its adoption of the High Dam project after Washington intervened to prevent the World Bank from financing it, thus setting into motion a chain of events which began with the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and ended with the tripartite aggression.

But even though Soviet support for Egypt may have been ideologically motivated, it did not aim to export the Bolshevik revolution to Egyptian society. On the contrary, it contributed rather to consolidating Egypt's independence, especially under Khrushchev, who introduced an important change to Stalinist doctrine. This was particularly apparent in the relationship of "friendship" Khrushchev developed with Egypt, which in many ways transcended Moscow's relations with fellow communist states. As he saw it, by nationalising the Suez Canal, standing up to the tripartite aggression and turning to the Soviet Union for help in constructing the High Dam, Egypt had done more to change the global balance of power to Moscow's advantage than any communist country.

Khrushchev developed the theory of the 'non-capitalist path to socialism', which served as the ideological basis for favouring Third World leaders like Nasser, who were characterised as nationalists, capable of evolving into socialists and, eventually, even into marxist socialists, that is, communists, as was the case with Fidel Castro in Cuba. To win over such leaders to socialism, the advocates of this theory had no qualms in calling on local communists to disband their independent organisations and join those of the state. After over a decade of misunderstandings between Nasser and the Egyptian communists, in which communists were subjected to imprisonment, detention and torture, the integration of Egyptian communists into Nasser's Socialist Union was implemented.

According to Khrushchev's theory, Third World countries whose national liberation movements had taken them into independence were transformed from being a reserve force for world imperialism into a reserve force for world socialism. The Soviet leader hoped that those countries would be drawn towards the world socialist pole, even while conceding that they would retain a degree of independence in the name of Non-Alignment. He hoped this would bring about a change in the global balance of power that would place the Soviet Union on an equal footing with the West and initiate a process of global détente that could free the communist world from constraints in the way of realising better living standards. If ideology was so important in the promotion of Egyptian-Soviet friendship in the past, how will Egyptian-Russian friendship fare in the absence of the ideological factor?

It should be noted that the collapse of the Soviet Union was due less to ideological than to technological factors, particularly in the field of the arms race, where Washington succeeded in forcing Moscow to assume a heavier burden than it could carry. After a period of "stagnation" which lasted for two decades under Brezhnev, Gorbachev tried to reconstruct socialism along lines that would circumvent the arms race. This attempt, which he labelled *"perestroika"*, failed, and precipitated the collapse of the whole regime. It can thus be said that ideology was not the key factor in deciding the fate of the Soviet Union, and that, accordingly, the disappearance of the ideological factor does not necessarily mean the disappearance of Russia's interest as a state and a people in maintaining and renewing its relations with the Arab world.

The Soviet Union may have failed to keep up with the United States in an arms race which acquired a space dimension with Reagan's Star Wars, but Moscow still retains a formidable thermonuclear arsenal that Washington can by no means disregard. Hence the latter's keenness on maintaining a strong NATO that has extended eastwards to include a number of former Warsaw Pact members. To the extent that such a strategy aims at containing Russia to the east, Russia would do well to look southwards to the Arab world to neutralise the American move.

The political map of the world is changing, and it should not remain frozen in time at the moment the West appeared to have scored a decisive victory in the Cold War, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, more precisely, at the moment the US seemed to be the unchallenged leader of the world during the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein. But America's leadership of the world now seems to have been only a transient phenomenon. The latest evidence of this is last week's Security Council resolution threatening Iraq with new sanctions, which this time was not passed unanimously but with five abstentions, including Russia and Egypt. That the US is no longer in a position to dictate its policies, either with respect to Iraq or Iran, was also made clear by the deal which the French oil company Total concluded with Tehran in open defiance of American legislation on the matter.

Now that communism can no longer be said to threaten Egyptian national security, there is no room for sensitivity between Moscow and Cairo over the ideological factor. True, the breakdown of the Soviet Union has revealed negative phenomena such as the growth of organised crime and the proliferation of petty smugglers, prostitutes and drug mafias, but these phenomena should not be considered as permanent features on the Russian landscape nor used as justification not to develop bilateral relations between the two countries.

However, the main challenge facing Primakov is to assert Russia's role as a co-sponsor of the peace process on an equal footing with the United States, at a time the latter has proved unable to revive the moribund process despite its many emissaries to the region. There is also the Doha economic conference, which will be attended by an important Israeli delegation and which is convening only at America's insistence. Can Primakov effectively back an Arab stand which would make the convocation of the conference conditional on Israel's halting its settlements policy and its performance of its contractual obligations, first and foremost, the principle of exchanging land for peace?

A greener future

By Naguib Mahfouz

We used to believe that environmental preservation was a luxury that developing countries, where people still go hungry, could not afford. Time has proven us wrong. How can a country expect to develop itself industrially by building cement factories, for example, that will destroy the health of an entire generation of children?

Human development is inseparable from industrial development. Developing countries would be well-advised to preserve their children's health, if only for the reason that today's children represent the labour force of tomorrow.

Our government's concern for the environment problem, and the appointment, in the most recent cabinet reshuffle, of a minister of state for environmental affairs, prove the state's awareness of the threat to the environment. This is a matter that affects human beings everywhere.

A healthy environment will be felt in the food and water that we eat and drink. Do the chemicals sprayed on our vegetables conform to international safety standards? If the Nile, which today resembles a wastewater conduit, is polluted, we will be directly affected. We stand to lose the most from pollution.

Preserving the environment is not a luxury. Environmental health is directly linked to human health, and therefore reveals the true depth of development.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Who's afraid of Madeleine?

Al-Ahali: "Egypt has many powerful cards to play if it chooses to resist US pressures to prevent it from boycotting the Doha conference. One of the most important of these cards is Egypt's capacity to harness a vast array of Egyptian and Arab political forces against the conference. Egypt still has an opportunity to play a leading role in the Arab region and to say 'no' to US pressure."
(Amina El-Naqash, 22 October)

Al-Wafd: "Those nations still sticking to their guns [over Doha] base their position on linking the convening of the conference with progress in the peace process. Any regional cooperation between Arabs and Israel must be based on finding a just and comprehensive peace settlement. If not, then there is no question of talking about cooperation [with Israel]. On this basis, talk about economic conferences and a rapprochement between Israel and her Arab neighbours fades into insignificance. There is nothing wrong in Egypt and the boycott nations taking a stand which will anger the US — how many times has the US taken a stand which angered Arabs? Rubbing the US up the wrong way has become imperative. It is the only way left to force America to wake up and realise that Arabs are capable of defending their own interests."
(Gamal Badawy, 23 October)

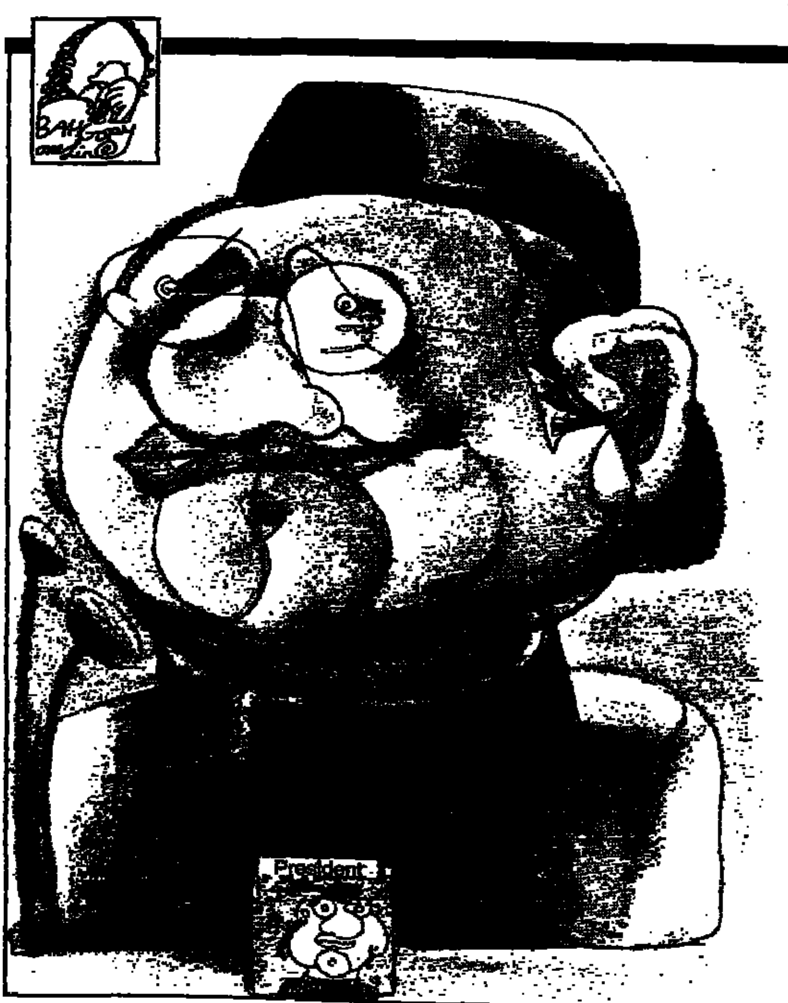
Al-Shaab: "The Doha conference is being convened simply in order to express our friendship with the Zionists and the Americans, despite the fact that we know the full extent of the deception being foisted upon us under the slogan land for peace. If we have opposed previous conferences we should oppose Doha with an even louder voice. But we have been taken by surprise by writers in the national press urging Egypt to attend the Doha conference, reiterating all the hollow pretexts of previous years as if nothing had changed and as if Netanyahu had not appeared on the scene! This is unacceptable, and Egypt should set an example to the smaller Arab nations that are intimidated by US pressure."
(Editorial, 24 October)

Al-Ahram: "We are not asking the US Administration for anything but the basic minimum in upholding the principle of 'land for peace'. Some of the Arab countries are unable to stand up to the US precisely because of America's brazen bias for the racist Jewish state. What can be done about the US while it twists the arm that hurts? And the US often warns some of our Arab brothers of the supposed threat of Iraqi aggression. America constantly reminds us that its troops remain on our territory to ensure our security."
(Zakaria Neil, 25 October)

Al-Mussawar: "If the Arabs attend the Doha conference without a glimmer of hope that there will be progress in the peace progress, they will lose their creditability before the world, and before themselves. This will mean slackening the offensive on Israeli policies and easing the isolation of Netanyahu and strengthening his position. It will also outrage Arab public opinion which supports the decisions of the Cairo summit. It is to be noted that pressures on Arab states continue so that they should send high powered delegates — at least at foreign minister level — since Madeleine Albright herself will attend!"
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 24 October)

Rose El-Youssef: "Few people are born to greatness and Mandela is one of them. He continued his struggle until he did away with apartheid in South Africa and he now struggles to preserve the principles he believes in worldwide. We are therefore not surprised at the great African leader's insistence on visiting Libya, despite impertinent US protests, to underline the continuance of his defiance. We hail this stance and applaud the growing role of South Africa. We hope that this role will be complementary with that of Egypt on the African continent."
(Editorial, 27 October)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The most vociferous champion of Third Worldism, the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, strikes me as a man with an iron will. His piercing eyes reflect his determination to right the world's wrongs. I gave him the face of the wise owl. A dimple in the chin does not dent Mohamad's political appeal in much of the Third World. I see Mohamad as the gracious host, his outstretched arms extending a warm welcome to fellow African, Asian and Latin American leaders as they gather for the G-15 meeting in Kuala Lumpur next week. I see the wise owl pointing and hooting with disapproval at the Western powers.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Nuclear monopoly

The accession to power of Mohamed Khatami, said to represent a large and influential moderate intellectual trend in Iran, has reopened the file of Arab-Iranian relations, on one hand, and brought the issue of US-Iranian relations to centre stage once more, on the other.

In both cases, the missing link in the equation is Israel, which has succeeded by various means in driving a wedge between the Arabs and Iran, first when it concluded an alliance with the Shah during the pre-Revolution era, and again assisted the Islamic Republic in the first Gulf War. During the second Gulf War, relations between the US and Iran reached their lowest ebb, which in turn affected Arab-Iranian relations.

It is only to be expected that any attempt to bring about a thaw in Arab-Iranian relations will set off alarm bells in the US and Israel. By the same token, any attempt to restore a semblance of normalcy in Iran's relations with the EU will trigger panic. Iran's relations with Europe are better than those it maintains with the Arab countries, despite the historical ties and mutual interests which continue to prevail within this region.

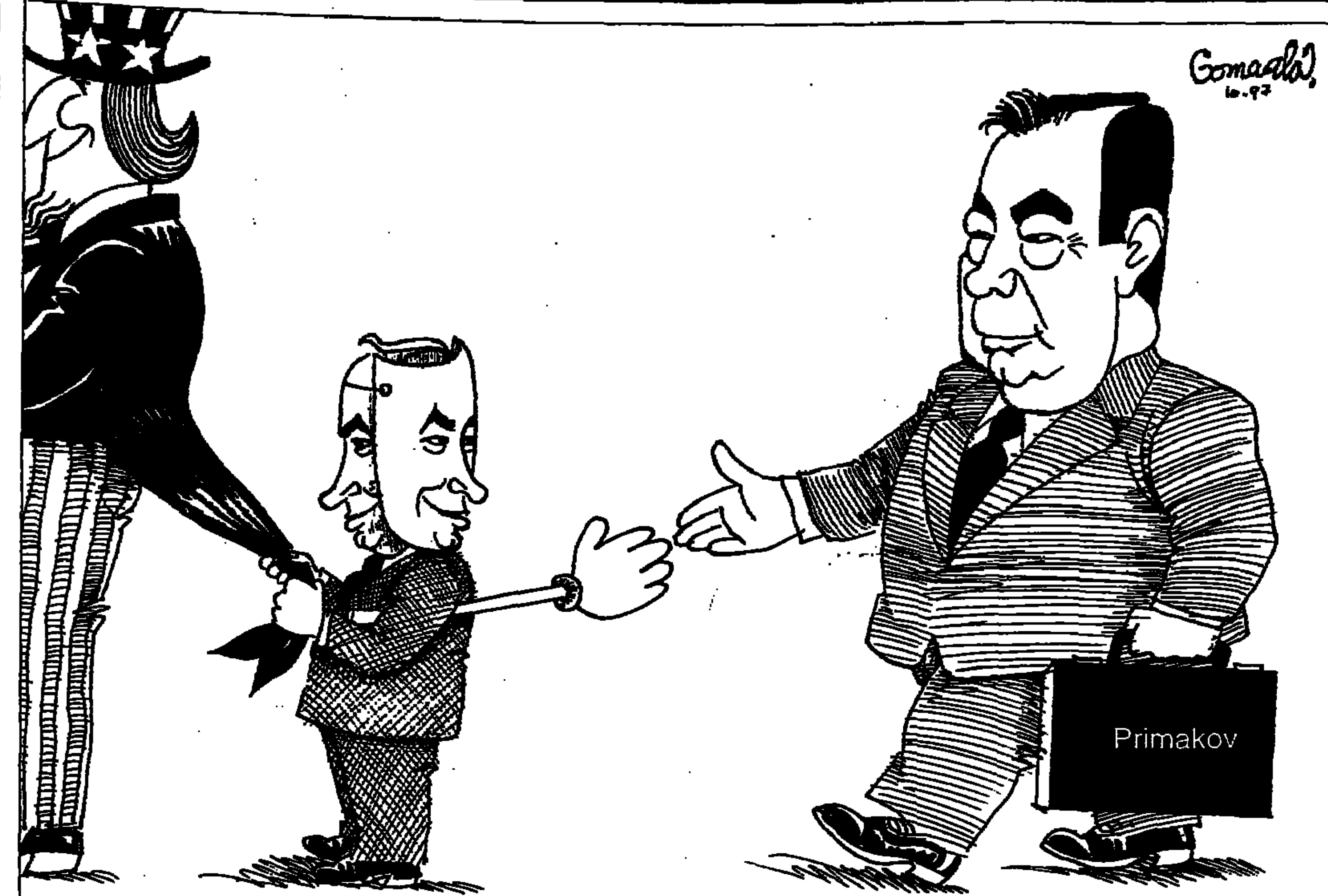
Cooperation between the Arabs and Iran in the current political situation, at a time when US hegemony and Israeli arrogance have reached their peak, requires that the two parties transcend their differences and open a new chapter in regional relations.

Apparently, the roots of US suspicion toward Iran are confined to those circles most concerned with promoting Israel's interests. This group is currently waging a fierce campaign against Iran's acquisition of nuclear and ballistic capabilities. The issue was at the top of the agenda during Al Gore's visit to Moscow. It was brought up in the talks being held in Washington with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Israel again raised the same topic during the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Primakov to the Middle East.

One need not be a genius to understand the real motives behind this flurry of diplomatic activity. The equipment provided to Iran by the Russians is quite similar to that which North Korea obtained from the US to build a new nuclear reactor. Of course, Israeli accusations that Iran is developing long-range missile capabilities which could reach Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, thus representing a security threat to the region, can also be leveled at Israel itself.

To date, Israel — unlike Iran — has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and still does not permit the International Nuclear Energy Agency to inspect its installations.

It is clear, therefore, that the real aim of the campaign against Iran is to preserve Israel's standing as the sole nuclear power in the region. Israel's primary aim is to deny any other power even the possibility of obtaining nuclear technology or expertise — let along building a nuclear reactor. Secure in the knowledge of its preponderance, Israel can continue to hinder the peace process — which is all the more reason for the Arabs to reconsider their inability to adopt an effective policy toward Israel's monopoly on nuclear power.



Soapbox

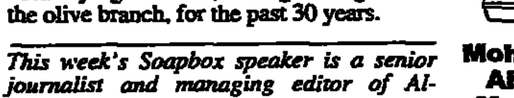
Despite the stings

The greatest compliment that an intellectual adversary can pay you is to try to muzzle you and suppress your views. This means that this adversary has no intellectual grounds on which to challenge you, and no argument with which to counter your position. The peace process is a case in point.

No one can dispute the inevitability of peace. On both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide, however, are people trying to promote their views through the suppression of rival opinions. Netanyahu's extremist policies have not only succeeded in obstructing the peace process, but lent force and justification to the ravings of this camp. Netanyahu, however, simply stirred up a hornets' nest.

When a group of courageous peace advocates — people who understand the gravity of the situation and the need for democratic participation in decision-making — attempted to shore up the staggering peace process by going to Copenhagen to build bridges with pro-peace forces in Israel, the wasps flew into a rage. They circled and stung, accusing the peace advocates of treason. Unable and unwilling to conduct a level-headed dialogue, they used the resolutions issued by certain professional syndicates to justify their attacks on the peace advocates.

This tactic is, to say the least, questionable. The foremost function of professional syndicates is to safeguard the ethics and standards of their professions. Their political views should not be used to censor the opinions of other groups. Such mindless censorship can only throw us back into the totalitarianism that brought about the 1967 defeat, the effects of which we have been trying to erase, through the gun and the olive branch, for the past 30 years.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a senior journalist and managing editor of Al-Ahram.



Mohamed Abdel-Moneim

Scandinavian medleys

Scandinavian attempts to influence the process of peace in the Middle East have been largely unsuccessful so far, writes **Milad Hanna**. But is all that set to change?

The three Scandinavian states are engaged in a tacit and honourable competition which will determine who is to play an appropriate, reasonable role in the Middle East crisis. For many months, Norway actually monitored secret negotiations between representatives of the Israeli government and delegates of the PLO, negotiations which led to the Oslo Accords. The signing of the accords sent a clear message to the parties involved: to wit, that it was possible to move forward with a specific strategy towards the fulfilment of a "comprehensive and just peace" in the region.

The success achieved in Oslo may be largely attributed to the common ground which existed at the time between the Israeli Labour government and the PLO — specifically, that both parties adhered to socialist democratic principles. In other words, religious fanaticism and extremism were not issues at the negotiating table. Neither the sacred books of the negotiating parties, the Torah and the Qur'an, nor their historical roots, were divisive factors hindering the elaboration of a common vision.

Similarly, the Oslo Accords further encouraged the drafting of mutual development projects, outlined in some detail in Shimon Peres' *A New Middle East*. In his book, Peres focused on joint venture schemes designed not for the benefit of Israel alone, but also for that of the Palestinians and the region as a whole.

The results of the general elections in 1996 which brought Netanyahu to power following the implementation of new constitutional principles were certainly not foreseen in the Oslo Accords. The political ground in which the Oslo Accords were rooted underwent a transformation; religion became the major consideration in any discussion — the key to any dialogue on security, for example — and ancient religious texts were consulted on such issues. The focus on religion on the Israeli side was accompanied by resurgent Islamism on the Palestinian side, the rise of an Islamist front consisting of Hamas and Hizbullah. As expected, the Oslo Accords were gradually eroded, rapidly bringing the peace process to the impasse in which it finds itself at present.

Denmark on the other hand, chose another course of action. It focused on bringing about a rapprochement between intellectuals in Israel and the Arab countries. Denmark invited a selected group from each party to "secret meetings" in Copenhagen with the idea of developing and signing a document to act as a catalyst for reviving Oslo. But the historical context and the secular cultural milieu were at odds with the general atmosphere, charged with religious tension, which had been created by Netanyahu's accession to power. In other words, Denmark's initiative to revive Oslo or to play a role in boosting the peace process was doomed to failure.

Sweden, on the other hand, chose to wait and watch the Norwegian and Danish experiences, in the hope of discovering a different course of action for itself. The course to be followed was eventually revealed. When political strategist Samuel Huntington published his article on the "clash of civilisations", now well-known among Arab intellectuals, in *Foreign Affairs* in the summer of 1993, the article seemed to have been designed as a political manual or practical guidebook for US policy in the ensuing period.

I believe that the effect of Huntington's work is comparable with that of the *Communist Manifesto*, written by Marx and Engels and published in 1848. The *Manifesto* became a practical guide-book, one of the major influences in forging European policies. The document was modified after the success of the Communist Revolution in overthrowing Tsarist rule in October 1917, and has continued to dominate political movements in most parts of the world for over a century and a half. The impact of the *Manifesto* may be said to have petered out only recently, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismemberment of the Soviet Union.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, several initiatives were made in an attempt to foresee the historical developments of the next century. Huntington's ideas represented one such initiative; they became an axis around which actions and theories revolved. The article gained worldwide recognition, a fact which encouraged Huntington to develop his article in a book published in 1996: *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order.*

One idea Huntington expressed caught my attention. Along the northern border of Islam, he writes, the conflict between the Serbs and Albanians and the ongoing massacres between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the strained relations between Russia and the Muslims in Central Asia rage on. The clash of civilisations has occurred with greatest ferocity in many parts of the Asian continent, between Muslims and other parties, including Christian Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, the Jews in Israel, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma and Catholics in the Philippines.

One of Huntington's most provocative statements, about "the bloody borders of Islam", is to be found at the end of this passage. Since he coined this phrase, it has seemed as though the West, specifically the United States, decided that its next enemy would be Islam. Each party has been seen to carry out preparations for the conflict. Relations between the West and Islam were imbued with ever-increasing tension, generating a general sense of concern and anxiety which transcended Western and Islamic countries to engulf the entire world.

Sweden promptly reacted to defuse the conflict, which, it perceived, would certainly involve the Middle East. Sweden therefore formulated its Euro-Islam Project in 1994, shortly after the publication of Huntington's ideas. Among the aims of the project was an academic programme to convene a series of academic conferences and dialogues between cultures, religions and civilisations which would undertake political analyses and studies with the aim of improving relations — in the long term — between Europe (including Sweden), on one hand, and Islamic Mediterranean countries, on the other. This Swedish project is part of the European project, known as the Barcelona Initiative, to improve cooperation with all Mediterranean states.

The document states explicitly that the project's principal objective is to ease cultural and religious tensions between European countries, and Middle Eastern countries with a Muslim majority. The project, therefore, could be regarded as a preventive measure, aimed at preventing violence and reducing deep-seated animosity, and in this sense may indirectly foster the peace process in the Middle East.

Despite its noble aims, and despite its desire to play a "tension-relieving role" in the conflicts and crises on the international arena, Sweden does not deny that it has immediate interests in this project. In recent years, Sweden has hosted increasing numbers of political refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Out of a total population of approximately nine million inhabitants, almost 200,000 are Muslim immigrants. The project, therefore, will generate certain domestic benefits, not least as a preventive measure against racist movements targeting foreigners in general and Muslims in particular. Sweden has only to look to France, Germany and other Western European countries where racism is on the increase. Its initiative, therefore, may be seen as a means of avoiding the escalation of racial conflicts with religious undercurrents.

At a meeting with high ecclesiastical officials of the Swedish Lutheran Church, one member told me proudly that the officials were pleased about the construction of a large mosque in their city, once a stronghold of the monarchy and the church. The construction of the mosque, in this man's opinion, is the concrete manifestation of religious coexistence in Sweden. Today, academic interest in Islam has developed to a considerable extent.

Within this context, Sweden has set for itself two objectives: to invite its European partners and the Islamic Mediterranean countries to draft a strategy for cultural dialogue; to cooperate with other states in cultural projects which enhance understanding, with the aim of establishing common cultural grounds with Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Turkey in particular.

In another meeting with Swedish policy makers, I learned that, several decades ago, Sweden had a consulate in Alexandria. The consulate, which overlooked the sea from an exceptional location near Ramleh Station, was charged with monitoring the interests of Swedish sailors. The building has become a Swedish cultural centre, its main task being to encourage cultural exchanges, and to rally support for the Euro-Islam project.

During a dinner hosted by Ambassador Lars Lundpick (former Swedish ambassador to Jordan), attended by Swedish members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a heated conversation involving Egyptian ambassador Sameh Darar and myself dealt with Huntington's theory. We all seemed to agree that the theory had influenced US policies and generated unjustified hatred for Islam.

I wonder whether Sweden, along with a number of fair and objective thinkers elsewhere in Europe could develop a substitute theory. Creating an environment conducive to greater understanding between civilisations, specifically between European and Arab-Islamic civilisations, may in fact produce such a substitute and foster a cultural environment more supportive of and conducive to the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

Will Sweden succeed where Denmark and Norway have failed?

To The Editor

Aida frustration

Sir- From what viewers of Channel 1 were able to see of *Aida* on its opening night in Luxor at Hatshepsut's Temple, the opera looked a very professional and spectacular production. In contrast, Channel 1's coverage was amateurish, technically faulty and appallingly directed.

It seems unlikely that viewers uninterested in opera would have stayed with the channel for the duration of its five-hour "Opera *Aida*" programme. But for those of us who did, we were rewarded with less than one hour of the live opera, from which we were snatched away mid-aria, mid-sentence, even mid-word!

I appreciate that aspects of the programme were designed to create the ambiance of Luxor, Karnak, Thebes, the VIPs and visitors, and they were effective, but there was sufficient time for these before and after the opera and during the intervals.

The interviews recorded during rehearsals were relevant, but why was one transmitted three times, the last occasion coinciding with what would have been the dramatic closing scene of *Aida*? And while the recordings of previous performances and concerts presented in Luxor and the Tutankhamun feature would have been of interest on another occasion, on the night they felt like unwelcome and interminable distractions.

Maybe it is time for *Al-Ahram Weekly* to consider running a regular or occasional TV column to encourage the best and scourge the worst of what is presented on our screens?

Caryll Faraldi
Luxor

How to lose friends

Sir- Congratulations on your first-class newspaper. It is beyond a doubt THE best English-language paper in the Middle East. Your correspondents are competent veterans (Graham Usher, Lamis Andoni) and your opinion writers world-renowned (Edward Said, Eqbal Ahmad, Eric Rouleau).

I am the co-ordinator of the Middle East Discussion Group at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. Every Thursday when your newspaper arrives, there is a literal fight between members over who will get the first copy. We have one subscription which we share between the 10 of us. Life-long friendships have almost been severed when one member hoards his/her copy and refuses to pass it on.

In order to preserve my friendships and gain quicker access to your wonderful paper, I have recently taken out my own subscription. Keep up the good reporting.

Nader A. Hashemi
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Barbaric is bad

Sir- In *Al-Ahram Weekly* (25 Sept-1 Oct), Fayza Hassan in her column *Pot Pourri* wrote about slaughtering a cow for the opening of a supermarket, "I have little sympathy for such barbaric practices." I was so shocked by the word barbaric that I looked it up in the Oxford dictionary to know what it really means: uncivilised, uncultured, rough and rude.

I am certain that if the writer knew what the word really means she wouldn't have used it. Slaughtering an animal for a good thing to come originates in our Egyptian culture. Slaughtering outdoors is bad, but not enough to be called barbaric.

Atef Abdel-Gawad Ali
Fayoum

A change of heart

Sir- I feel it is urgent to correct something I wrote previously. A few years ago, I wrote about the situation in Algeria and the then promising Algerian Islamist movement. Time has proven the mendacity of such outlawed groups, attesting to the fact that what is born illegitimately must willy-nilly grow up and succumb in the same illicit way in which it was born.

I was highly impressed by the programme of pseudo-reform they advocated during the election upheavals. This programme eventually turned out to consist merely of words void of the force of action.

Although I was only a sympathiser, not a member, of the Brotherhood or any similar group, I fervently defended their programmes. These ultimately turned out to be premeditated genocide and subversion. At the time, I was completely unaware of the clandestine agenda in which mass killings and subversion are top priorities.

Time has proven the truth of facts that I used to dismiss as lies or attempts at hushing up a highly promising programme of Islamic revival; but now, with the entire picture before my eyes, I deeply regret all the sympathy I gave to such "unworthy vermin", as they were once dubbed in *Time* magazine.

This fundamental transformation in my attitude is actually not as abrupt as it may seem; it began two years ago, when the outlawed groups laid their cards on the table. I was stimulated to write this letter in particular by an incident that happened in Algiers recently, when breakaway groups tried to bomb a crowded mosque during the Friday prayers — a blatant violation of any human feeling or code of ethics. The attempt is a patent sign of their evil intentions and their ominous radical agenda in the whole Arab region.

Mohamed Amin
Faculty of Education
Cairo University (Beni Suef)

Punching bags

Sir- I am a Singaporean living in Egypt. Reading Shaden Shehab's article "Off with her head!" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23-29 October), I was reminded of my own conversations with friends about the car crash that killed Diana and Dodi. What struck me was that those from countries that have never been colonised brushed aside conspiracy theories as absolute nonsense, while those who have been "colonised" admitted to fleeting suspicions of foul play. It appears that British imperialism has left its mark.

One may decry all publications alleging that Diana's death was premeditated as fantasies and hogwash, but it is easy to see why there is a large readership devouring the conspiracy theories, apart from the normal human appetite for sensational news.

Egypt suffered from British occupation and control for a sufficient number of years in the past for its people to have realised that a good many British people perceive people from the colonies as lesser beings. For some Brits, this "blinkered superiority" (to quote the *Weekly's* Mansoor Mirza) persists to this day. The Duke of Edinburgh is a fine example. It is said that he called Dodi "a greasy bed-hopper", forgetting that his eldest son was adept at the same sport during his marriage. At least Dodi was single. The Duke has also been quoted on previous occasions as making many other racist remarks about "slit-eyed Chinese" and "drunken Scots" that his status as a "royal racist" is uncontested. With such overt racism from a royal personage, one can be forgiven for hastily assuming that Britain is a nation of racists.

Nor did it help that the British media hardly noticed that other had been killed in the same car crash that killed their beloved princess.

Then it was reported that the Mossad had been running around pouring poison into the ears of "enemies of the Jews".

Given this backdrop, Egyptians can be forgiven for believing in stories of foul play when the budding relationship between Dodi and Di was brought to such a tragic and horrible ending.

It is not everyday that one of Egypt's sons achieves such international fame. And when dreams are shattered and heroes suddenly snatched away, it is a natural reaction for people to grieve and search for an appropriate punching bag. The British picked the paparazzi; Egyptians chose M16.

Agnes Sng
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Cairo
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Gomaa says it all

Sir- *Al-Ahram Weekly*, without any exaggeration, is among my favourite English-language newspapers. Its layout is excellent, language simple and straightforward and it deals with political issues objectively and without any attempt at sensationalism.

I am also a great admirer of the political cartoons of *Al-Ahram Weekly's* cartoonist Gomaa. Each of his political cartoons expresses ideas and sentiments that often a full-page article will fail to express. My sons share my admiration for Gomaa's cartoons and we would like to know more about him, his life, and how he came to develop his talent.

Khaled Hamoud Bursali
Director
Gulf Continental Consultants Office
Al-Dasma
Kuwait

Spit and polish

David Blake canters across Hungarian plains

The Honved Ensemble, Budapest, and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Gergely Kesseljak, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 23 Oct

It's not what you do but the way that you do it. Who wants this sort of stuff anymore? Grand grand grand. The age which produced it is dead and gone, but the spirit remains, and the music. The exterminator may dry up the oceans but the spirit of this music seems to go on forever. Nor are its origins low. The composers whose music we heard were trained in the finest academies of the Austro-Hungarian world.

Any real soldiers of fortune, like the Honved group, know how to shine their shoes. Spit and polish. They applied this practice with splendid results, sometimes a bit more spit than polish, but the end remained true to the style of the music.

It is a very special style, Austro-Hungarian operetta, the first of its line, with absolutely no present day rivals. It is grand, the style is the manner, and the company had this particular manner. Hungarian music, whether from Zigeuner and the great plains of Hungary or café theatre or great Bartok, shared the same manner. It is as grand as grand can be. It is the skin of the soul, and it is viscer-al, like the Hungarian race. These players were *plein de race* and proud of it.

And so this Operetta Gala had a feeling not often encountered these media days — total involvement and belief in what is being done. Dedication, neither kitsch nor camp. After this show of ours let the place burn down: that's the attitude they seem to have. All Eastern-Balkan Europe has it, and it pervades the Russian dance. Woe to them all if, under pressures from outside, they lose it for then they lose themselves and another art form disappears.

They do not smile much. No toothy glitz to cover a chocolate with no centre. They have plenty of spirit which flows over the production like Tokay: it is colourful and with the correct zesty flavour.

The performance was in two pieces, an intermission allowing some sort of rest for the singers because these pieces need real singing.

The opening was a vocalised Strauss *Blue Danube* with soprano Zsuzsa Csonka. A strong robust voice, beautifully produced in all registers — never a scream or a squeeze. The old *Blauen Donau* never sounded more alluring.

The setting for the entire show was intimidating: a huge musical comedy, red plush, gold banistered staircase, Broadway 1926. This gangplank provided the group with something from which to jump into each item. Tricky, but no one tripped. These players provided Ziegfield Follies with class. The staircase was fun and became part of the historical-optical musical-operetta set piece each of the artists used in his or her own way. The audience was not small and no one left before the end which constitutes a tribute of sorts.

The tenor, Tamas Daroczy, who came after Csonka, knows everything about the medium and the manner of the music. He swells beautifully to the high notes and his voice is in the right place, just next to the heart.

The dancers came next. Costumes well-tailored, dresses flouncing, but stylish and the men, tall, springy, immaculately groomed, very Drury Lane, London 1930.

There were Gypsy numbers and plenty of long-legged thigh involvement. Necessary: all part of the time and the show. Historically, there's nothing wrong with men's legs, certainly not before the baboon waddle took over after the last world war. White ties and tails helped set the pace. This type left the scene after two wars wiped them out. Sad to feel the aura passing. There was a song Marlene sang: *Where have all the flowers gone?/ Gone to graveyards everyone.* And sometimes during this show, a deep dark note was struck: where are the flowers and the snows of yesteryear? Gone into the Danube every one.

There was comedy. Charleston and a shimmy. Duets. There were plenty by Suppé from *Boccacio*: by Emmerich Kalman and with Lehar making his appearance at last.

The conductor Gergely Kesseljak took the Cairo Symphony Orchestra through this varied display of songs with a relish of speed. Together they were active as pace-setters. The orchestra positively ran away with itself on occasions and gave the correct schmaltzy role to the big numbers. A Cairo Symphony with a new hairstyle — sliced up the front and shaved behind. Together they all brought the first half of the Follies to a smash, ending with the Tritsch-Tratsch Polka of Johann Strauss.

Second halves are usually more meaty. And this was. A Liszt rhapsody is fast-lane Hungarian. It always begins with the movement they call the *Lassu* — soft, slow and sexy, it speeds up and then leaps into a sex change with the *Friss*. Shake that body. The Cairo Symphony shook like hell.

Only a short shake into *The Merry Widow* and *Land of Smiles*. This is everyone's Lehar. We are in Richard Tauber land where once, a lifetime away, tears of joy flowed all over the place. There's also a waltz song called Weeping and Laughing, and it fits the mood we now entered. The widow herself, aided by the conductor, showed the speed at which the Vilja Lied should go: quickly, almost at the speed of speech. It was a proper ballad, not a sticky smooch song.

Kalman ended the concert. He wrote maybe the greatest hit song for tenors for all time. *You Are My Heart's Delight*. This is calamity and holocaust-proof music. There are no good-byes for Kalman. Tamas Daroczy let fly his splendid voice. We had no tears or sentiment. We had been everywhere in this concert: Zigeuner princesses in hibiscus dress and gypsy queens and kings. Gender became a recognisable identity. It is now out-of-date and old. Maybe the next Euro-temptress will come from China and we'll all be happy again.



A rehearsal of *The Merry Widow* in Budapest, photographed by Rolff Benny

Cinema

Chasing morals away

Khairiya El-Bishlawi finds that, popular heroes notwithstanding, *Afreet El-Nahar* falls flat on its face



In their daydreams the oppressed entertain fantasies about a brave hero who will help them overcome the insuperable obstacles, usually constructed from corruption of one form or another, placed in the path of their ambitions. And those who produce films seeking mass appeal exploit their audiences yearning for a saviour, giving the viewers their desired hero and escapist alternative. Of course, every period has its own forms of corruption, and hence its particular brand of imaginary redeemer.

In the nineties, the trend has been to dramatise the battles of ordinary people confronting the abuses perpetrated by political and financial bigwigs. The hero and his cronies are, more often than not, pitted against corrupt government figures. These heroes are clever, patriotic sons of the people. More often than not, they distinguished themselves in the 1973 war, only to discover that their bravery in the field had earned them nothing, and that for the homeland to be liberated the war must continue against corruption on the home front.

These heroes often share characteristics with the heroes of polpular epics, such as *Al-Zeinati Khalifa*, *Abu Zeid Al-Hilali* and *Antara*. Indeed, in the latest of these films, *Afreet El-Nahar* (Daytime Demons), the hero is called Abu Zeid Al-Hilali. It's as simple as that. And here, for the first time, we get a good demon who shows up in daytime to petrify the baddies. Unfortunately our good demon, despite being played by that old pro Nour El-Sherif, remains less than convincing.

Abu Zeid forces two senior officials in security — Mazhar Pasha (played by Hassan Hosni) and Deia Bassiouni (Adel Hashem playing a character whose name is a clear reference to a notorious Nasserite officer who specialised in torture) — to commit suicide after he uncovers a bloody crime, loosely based on a true story, they had committed. Mazhar Pasha, in the course of a terrible fight, throws the husband of his mistress from a tenth-floor balcony. His colleague, Bassiouni, abuses his power to cover up the crime, silence suspicious voices and ensure that the verdict at the inquest should be suicide.

The film begins with the murder of the honest, self-made husband, takes in the murder of another innocent, primary teacher Abduh, but winds up with evil punished, virtue triumphant and Abu Zeid married to the rich crime journalist.

The director, Adel El-Assar, is an old hand at action movies. The hallmarks are all there: car chases, crude sexuality, the swaying body of the unfaithful wife, good-looking actors, unconvincing characters etc.

Nour El-Sherif won the Best Actor Award for this role at the recent Alexandria Film Festival, and Mohamed El-Tagi (who plays the tragicomic character Abduh), also received an award. The screenplay is written by Bassiouni Othman. But the film features a deal of bad acting, mostly in the female roles. Manal Afifi, a first time actress who plays the debauched Nana, puts in an over-enthusiastic, artificial performance. Ilham Chahine, who plays the honest journalist Riham, makes her character at once silly and forced.

Using the plight of an innocent abroad — here a primary school teacher of peasant origin now living in the capital — the film is a compendium of the social ills that plague Egypt. Education comes under fire. As a physical education teacher, Abduh doesn't have the space in which to guide his pupils through the exercises. The women teachers' less than appealing appearance is caricatured. The workings of practically compulsory private lessons are explored in all their gory details. The film also alludes to the terrible financial impasse school teachers face now that employment in petro-dollar countries is no longer a realistic possibility. And there are the comic sketches centering on the sexual frustrations of Abduh and Abu Zeid who cannot afford to get married and instead stroll around the streets, eying women's legs and scrutinising the lingerie in shop windows.

On the action level, there is the sequence of black-clad baddies racing around in a black car, scaring the pedestrians to death. Then there is the black-car chase, witnessed by the chivalrous Abu Zeid, of Mona, the forensic doctor who will not have her arm twisted into writing suicide rather than murder in her report.

The film is a psuedo-earnest commercial concoction of farce and the romanticised conventions of the action movie. It is noteworthy that every institution is run by a corrupt official whose underlings are scrupulously honest. If we get the conniving forensic director general, we also get Mona, whose integrity almost costs her her life. The two corrupt senior security officials are pitted against the patriotic officer Mamdouh Rashwan. Naturally, heading the camp of the goodies is Abu Zeid, who is rewared with love and luxury.

In both the main and secondary plots, the film emphasises the morality minted by Sadat in the days of the Open Door Policy and its quick profits — the so-called village morality. The vast majority of good people in the film have their roots in the countryside. Almost inevitably, the goodies meet on a green field in the course of the rural funeral of an innocent victim.

The problem with escapist commercial cinema is that it weaves an artificial, flimsy world where the possibilities of proper characterisation and a coherent plot are foreclosed, causing its supposed taison d'etre, the moral message, to fall flat.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Youth Salon
Centre of Arts, 1, Maahad El-Swissri, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm.
Annual showing of new works by young artists.

Wafiq Madbouli Ayad
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.

Bookmarkers
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-p2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
A collection of 80 bookmarks, from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Mohamed Abla (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
Works under the title Ward El-Nil.

Franz Kafka
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Until 30 Oct.
Documents and photographs relating to the writer.

Susanne Popelka (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, noon-8pm. Until 30 Oct.
New works portraying masks, eyes and bodies.

Fatouh Said (Sculpture) & **Raffat Zaki** (Drawings)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Doctors' Tower, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily 12noon-10pm. Until 30 Oct.

Nagui Moussa Basilioos (Paintings)
Cairo Atelier, 2, Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 31 Oct.

Sheikh Ramadan Abu Sweilam and Sayed Amin Fayed (Paintings)
Shomou' Gallery, El-Horreya Sq, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Daily exc Fri, 10am-7pm. Until 4 Nov.
Recent works on display.

Maja Sorie (Paintings)
Sheba Gallery, 6 Sri Lanka St (Yehia Ibrahim St), Apt 1, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 8 Nov.

Sarwat El-Bahr & Mounir Canaan (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montazah, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 9 Nov.

Essam Sedqi El-Gabakhnagui (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 13 Nov.

Heinrich Böll: His Life and Works (Documents)
Goethe Institute, language studies department, 14 Hussein Wassef St, Missaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 348 4500. Until 13 Nov.

Omar El-Fayoumi (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 14 Nov.

Anna Orphanou Gulyás (Paintings)
Spiro Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77c, Golf Area, Maadi. Opening 3 Nov, 7pm. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 14 Nov.
Oil and water paintings by the wife of the Cypriot ambassador under the title Mexican Souvenirs.

Egyptian Features
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 2287. Opening 2 Nov, 7pm. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 15 Nov.
Black and white photographs from the collection of Elwi Farid.

Albrecht Dürer
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Zamalek, c/o Goethe Institute, tel 575 9877. Opening 5 No, 6pm. Until 25 No.
Fifty-six reproductions of sixteenth century woodworks.

The Eighth AUC Student Art Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. 2-26 Nov.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

Sans Toit Ni Loi
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 30 Oct, 7pm.
Directed by Agnès Varda (1985).

Ende Einer Dienstfahrt
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 30 Oct, 7pm.
Directed by Hans Dieter Schwarze (1971).

Song of the Spring Pony
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 30 Oct, 6pm.
Directed by Seijiro Koyama (1986).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Speed 2
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Sandra Bullock and Jason Patric.

Shadow Conspiracy
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Charlie Sheen and Linda Hamilton.

Fierce Creatures
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With John Cleese, Jamie Lee Curtis, Kevin Kline and Michael Palin.

Volcano
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Tommy Lee Jones.

Con Air
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With John Malkovich and Nicholas Cage.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9.pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.



Nagui Moussa Basilious

Hanheb We Ne'eb (We'll Love and Rise Above)
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon II, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown, Tel 575 8797. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Farouq El-Fishawi.

Afreet El-Nahar (Daytime Demons)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Elham Shahin.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown, Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Youssef Chahine's latest production, with Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida and Safeiya El-Emari.

MUSIC

Sinfonietta I
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 30 Oct, 8pm.
The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, along with oboe soloist Yuri Ilyn, perform Strauss' Serenade for 13 Wind Instruments in E-flat major op.7, Weber's Concerto for Oboe and Wind Instruments in C-major and Dvorak's Serenade for 10 Wind Instruments, Cello and Double Bass op.44 in d-minor; conducted by Mohamed Hamdy.

Cairo Opera Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 31 Oct, 2pm.
Conductor Sherif Mohieddin and violin soloist Ahmed Fathy present works by Schubert.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 31 Oct, 8pm.
Nevine Allouba performs.

Children's Concert I
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 2 Nov, 11pm.
The Cairo Symphony Orchestra performs Mozart's Toy Symphony, Khatchaturian's Children's Suite op.11 and Prokofiev's Peter and The Wolf, under conductor Sayed Awad.

Incanto Ensemble
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 30 Oct, 8pm.
Guido Schiefen (violoncello), Liese Klahn (piano) and Ralph Manno (clarinet) perform selections from Debussy, Poulenc, Schumann and Brahms.

Classic Guitar Duo
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 30 Oct, 8pm.
European music from the eighteenth to the twentieth century performed by Karim Prège and Hossam Chafei.

Arab Music Festival
Small Hall, Opera House, as above & Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 1-10 Oct. For details, contact the venues.

THEATRE

Three Stories from The One Thousand and One Nights
Beit El-Harawi, behind El-Azhar mosque. Tel 340 4234. Until 3 Nov, 8.30pm.
Sherine El-Ansari tells the stories of Shahrayar and Shah Zaman, Ward Fil-Akmam and Anas El-Wogoud and Dalila.

El-Milad (The Birth)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 6.30pm. Until 31 Oct.
Scripted and directed by Khaled El-Sawi and performed by El-Haraka El-Masraheiya Troupe.

Bahlool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm; Fri, 8.30pm
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm; Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinat Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm
Said Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and legendary dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Taraima II (Hymn II)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Entessar Abdel-Fattah.

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and Ahmed Ibrahim.

Senouhi
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Ahmed Fouad Selim and directed by Teymour Abashedzi.

El-Qa'eda Wal Estethna' (The Rule and the Exception)
El-Zorqani Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8.30pm.
With Mohamed Anani and Hamada Abdel-Halim, directed by Mamdouh Aql.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.
With Lucy, Sherif Mounir, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Mohamed Heneidi and Alaa Waleyeddin; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Ayam El-Insan El-Sab'a (The Seven Days of Man)
El-Ghouri Palace, Al-Azhar, Al-Hossein. Tel 511 0472. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Nasser Abdel-Moneim.

LECTURES

Three Recent Views on the Implementation of Islamic Law
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 30 Oct, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Maurits Berger, Leiden University.

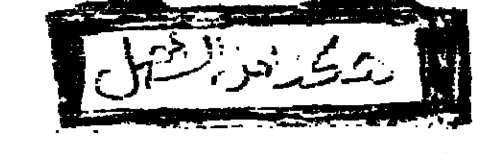
The Ayyubids (1171-1250) & Early Bahri Mamluks (1250-1310)
American Research Centre, 2 Simon Bolivar Sq, Garden City. Tel 354 8239. 3 Nov, 5pm.
The second of the five slide-lecture series on the Islamic architecture of Cairo, by William Lyster.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

HUNDREDS of works by young Egyptian artists, in a variety of media, are currently on show at this year's Youth Salon at the **Centre for Arts, Zamalek**. First prizes were awarded to: **Khaled Makawi** (painting), **Sanaa Mahmoud** (engraving), **Hossam Badr El-Din** (drawing), **Abdel-Ghani Mohamed** and **Amal Abdel-Ghani** (sculpture), **Diaa El-Din Dawood** (ceramics), **Samy Saleh** (photography) and **Mahmoud Meneisi** (installation).



Victor Vasarely

The **Opera Gallery** hosts a retrospective of works by **Victor Vasarely**. The works on show are a representative sample of the various stages of Vasarely's career which culminated in a move towards optical art.

Medallions by sculptor **Hassan Khalifa** are on show at the gallery attached to the **Faculty of Fine Arts**. These show what is needed in such an art form: simple, strong, expressive lines.

Textiles by **Wafik Madbouly** and his students occupy the **foyer of the Al-Ahram Building**. These employ various methods of printing.

The Atelier, Alexandria, hosts paintings by **Mustafa Abdel-Wahab**. The subject matter for these is not nature in the narrow sense — landscapes, seascapes, etc — but rather energy fields, planetary motions, gravity.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



Nearer the horizon

Ahmed Bahaa Eldin commanded a wide circle of readers and admirers throughout the Arab world. He was an ardent believer in Pan-Arabism and a formative influence on many leading intellectuals and politicians in the region. Last week the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, opening the first cultural event organised by the newly-founded Society of the Friends of Ahmed Bahaa Eldin, paid tribute in the following words: "I feel personally indebted to him, for he adopted me as a member of his family...and made me a friend of all his friends. I celebrated my 30th birthday in his house; he taught me to listen carefully to the heart of Egypt, and to grow feathers on my wings not to fly away from the land but to draw nearer to the horizon. Maybe he told me, too, that wings can grow too big for the body of the bird to carry." The first poem Darwish read at the event was "The Hoopoe." Ziad Bahaa Eldin, the writer's son, outlines the aims and ambitions of the society, while Nur Elmessiri mulls over the overwhelming question haunting "The Hoopoe" and finds in the poem no easy answers



The Friends of Ahmed Bahaa Eldin Society

The idea of establishing the Friends of Ahmed Bahaa Eldin Society arose a couple of years after the late Ahmed Bahaa Eldin suffered a severe brain hemorrhage which prevented him from pursuing further his forty year career as a political and social commentator, during the course of which he had emerged as a major influence on modern Arab thinking. At that time, a number of his friends, together with members of his family, discussed various ideas for maintaining both his influence and promoting his ideals.

During those early discussions it quickly emerged that the aim of any such effort would not be to commemorate one man, but rather to honour his memory by providing the kind of service to society that would allow others — particularly the young — to benefit from this service. This has remained the guiding principle of the society, and the basis upon which it hopes to distinguish itself from more traditional methods of commemorating writers, thinkers and artists.

For a variety of reasons — mostly legal — it was agreed that two organisations would be established: the first, a UK foundation which would take the form of a trust fund and be responsible for collecting contributions from individual donors from all over the Arab world, while the second would be an Egyptian society under the supervision of the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs which will be the vehicle through which all activities are undertaken.

In 1995 a UK trust fund was established and launched at a ceremony at the Egyptian Embassy in London, with the help of Ambassador Mohamed Shaker. The foundation was successful in collecting contributions from individuals and organisations from Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Iraq, as well as from Egypt. And in 1996, the Friends of Ahmed Bahaa Eldin Society was established in Egypt and registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Ahmed Bahaa Eldin's death in August 1996 delayed the launching of the society in Egypt, though the sympathy it generated demonstrated the urgent need for the society to play its anticipated role in cultural life of the region. After extensive discussions, the founders of the society agreed that it would undertake four main areas of activity: the sponsorship of a school in the late writer's village in Assiout; the organisation of annual lectures and cultural vents; the provision of annual scholarships and prizes for young writers, journalists and the collection, classification and publication of Ahmed Bahaa Eldin's complete works.

The celebrations which took place last week represent the official launching of the society in Egypt and the beginning of its activities. The society held its general meeting on the fringe of the celebrations and took a number of specific resolutions.

These include the setting up of a library at the Ahmed Bahaa Eldin School in Assiout during the current academic year, a computer centre during the following, and a science laboratory during the third. The society will also organise an annual memorial lecture during the spring as well as a literary-artistic event during the autumn. The evening of poetry reading by Mahmoud Darwish accompanied by the pianist Yasser Mukhtar held at the Opera House last week was the first such event. And finally it was agreed that the terms and conditions of the first scholarship for the writing of a book would be announced in April 1998.

The society also celebrated the opening of premises at 23 Kasr El-Nil Street where it intends to hold various meetings and discussion groups. The premises will also contain, by the beginning of next year, a library and a reading room where current journals and newspapers, along with back issues, will be available.

Last week's celebrations were intended to announce that the society is finally established. Its future depends on the continuous support and encouragement of those who read and supported Ahmed Bahaa Eldin during his long career. The society will not be an exclusive club, but a forum for all those interested to meet, discuss and formulate the best way to provide the kind of services which the society has set out as its goal, and in doing so to commemorate the work and memory of Ahmed Bahaa Eldin.

The plight of the birds

Darwish's "The Hoopoe" is about a journey that cannot quite get off the ground or materialise. The hoopoe acts as a guide for the other birds, telling them, in the poem's manner of speaking, "Do not ask what is it. Let us go and make our visit". In spite of the poem's namesake, a majesterial, self-possessed creature, "The Hoopoe" is, none the less, an insistent asking of a question through the pathetically, all too human voice of the bewildered birds who desperately want to arrive elsewhere and who protestingly cling to the here and now by turns. Why the mess of history if eternity anyhow embraces, contains and brackets it? Why the appearance of the many, why the four elements (earth, water, air, fire) if in Reality they are One? Why the unfolding of becoming from Being? What kind of Love — our origin, our end — *is it that is so unmoved by and removed from* our suffering? The hoopoe's answer "Fly that you may fly" seems too cruel to be wholeheartedly embraced by birds who do not have much faith in their ability to fly.

The birds and their burden or song, the poem, half-heartedly follow the hoopoe. They, the poem, are tired to the point of inertia. They want to get there, wherever that is, home-earth or home-sky, to close an exhausting narrative that by now, after centuries of wandering and exile is too grimly open to bear thinking about. Their turning this way and that — from history/detail/multiplicity/the earth to eternity/essence/unity/the sky and back again — lacks tension. They flap weak vestigial wings. They dither and flit hither and thither not like a moth driven mad by the flame calling for it, not like tortured souls who, damned, crave salvation, but like so many shades in purgatory. History is one damn thing after another, they might well say and, like Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, who "knows not what the curse [on her] may be", they are "half sick" of it all.

In Yeats's "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" which deals with similar paradoxes as Darwish's "The Hoopoe", the Soul representing "ancestral night", eternity, the sky and the Self representing mortality, history and the earth, engage with each other. An argument, with all the push and pull that argument involves, unfolds and a stand is taken. The Soul, as majesterial and self-possessed as the hoopoe, advises the Self to "scorn the earth" in order to be delivered from the curse, "the crime of death and birth". Though the Self lends an ear to the Soul, is tempted by the mystical realm where struggle has ceased, the Self remains stubbornly commited to the world of strife and multiplicity. The Self cannot, tempting though the prospect is, "fix [its] every wandering thought upon/ That quarter where all thought is done." It keeps remembering an "ancient", "consecrated" sword which "Montashigi, third of his family fashioned .../ Five hundred years ago" — and sets such an "emblem of the day", of history, of earth, against all things "emblematical of the night", of eternity, the sky. Faced by the Self's stubborn holding onto the centuries, the Soul's "tongue [becomes] a stone" and the Self has the last triumphant word:

"A living man is blind and drinks his drop./ What matter if the ditches are impure?/ What matter if I live it all once more?.../... /I am content to live it all again/ And yet again, if it be life to pitch/Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,/A blind man battering blind men;/.../ When such as I cast out remorse/ So great a sweetness flows into the breast/ We must laugh and we must sing,/ We are blest by everything,/ Everything we look upon is blest."

There are swords in Darwish's "The Hoopoe", *but they do not exist under the sign of* heroism. The swords do not have much to pierce. The rhetoric in which is couched the veil offering itself for piercing to the birds' beaks is flimsy and moth-eaten. And the beaks themselves have had, for centuries, to scrape a living from rocks and have been dulled by this necessary scraping. You, the *Master of all things*, condemn us — the refrain of the birds' complaint goes — to a history that blunts the sharpest of beaks — (it is true we had our moments, we did after all "when we bit the rocks open/ a space for jasmine") — and then ask us to pierce the veil: this is too much and we are, as you willed, human, *all* too human. And humans, as you willed, do not fly.

The Soul in Yeats gives and takes with the Self, addresses it, engages with it — just as Attar's hoopoe engages with the other birds in *The Conference of the Birds*. Not so Darwish's hoopoe. Follow that you may follow, he says. Where to? the birds ask. Do not ask such questions, but if you want an answer, the answer is "distance...beyond distance...beyond distance" — and you have no choice but to fly. *There is*, ultimately, no conflict, no narrative, no meaning, just the single burning moment of what is. What is is regardless of your small dreams. What is is regardless of "the Athenians, Persians... Plato, Zarathustra, Plotinus", regardless of Attar, Aristophanes's *The Birds*, Amal Donqol's "Birds", *regardless of the Assyrians*, the Babylonians, commandments, the stations of the Cross, ancient Egypt or ancient China ... is regardless of your here and now, is regardless of your burden, your song.

In Attar's *The Conference of Birds*, the birds, thirty in all — thousands perished on the Way — *finally arrive to their king and master*, the Simurgh (literally, thirty birds). They arrive to what they are — with a difference (the thousands who perished on the Way perhaps?). Darwish's birds, profoundly marked, deny it though they may, by what the priestesses of all ages told them, seem to be haunted by a more "tragic" historical vision. *They sense that to* truly arrive they cannot leave anything behind, that our traces are unavoidably before us and that arrival and redemption must be profoundly marked by these traces. To soar to Him, we must be light. But we cannot soar unless we carry Her (our mother, the earth where *history unfolds*, where our dead whose *death* shall not be in vain are buried) on our head. The hoopoe is constitutionally able to do precisely that. He has his crown, his mother's grave; he has his wings; he has the secret. But humans are birds that do not fly.

Realising that the hoopoe has what they do not have and can hence fly where they can only dither, the birds return to earth. At some level, they, and not the hoopoe, have the last word. There is, however, no sense in the poem that they, like Yeats's Self, make a triumphantly stubborn choice to *stay. Their return simply happens* — casually, almost negligently, along the line of least resistance. Their arrival is belated. There is a sense that they are redundant in the scheme of things. With or without them, She already has what she has — *things here and there. With* or without them, He is what he is — One above it all. True, there are some attempts, in the closing lines of "The Hoopoe", to achieve a triumphal closure. If, however, you have followed the poem's movement, there is no *easy consolation. Follow the over*whelming question that you may follow: Why are we birds that do not fly? In the questioning is the striving. Follow and perhaps (who knows?) circular time may be broken.

Plain Talk

When, in the late 1950s, C P Snow presented his thesis about the two cultures, basically the liberal arts and the sciences, he opened the lid on an argument that looks set to run and run.

Certainly, following Snow's 1959 Rede lecture, the debate he opened had pertinence, though quite whether the gap he perceived between scientific and humanistic culture should be blamed on literary intellectuals, as he appeared to suggest, is open to question. The fact remains, however, that for Snow and many others of his generation, the goals of scientific research seemed antithetical to the avowed optimism of humanism.

Snow was writing at a time when the carpet had been pulled from beneath the admittedly clay feet of 19th century positivism. Perhaps, following the carnage of the First World War, it should have been apparent to all that technological advances could produce unimaginable horrors, a message that was writ even larger at the close of the Second World War, precipitated by the atomic bombing of Japan. The world would never be the same.

Far from promoting the welfare of humanity, science had shown itself capable of unleashing unimaginable destruction. Simultaneously, the slow unravelling of the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis called into question the very idea that humanity was somehow capable of rising above the bestiality that Tennyson had memorably characterised as "nature red in tooth and claw."

The pretensions that had underwritten so much 19th century thinking came suddenly, even within the context of mainstream, popular culture, to seem implausible. Not, of course, that it was ever so simple. Voices had been raised against the prevailing orthodoxy for some time. In 1893, post-Darwin, T H Huxley had pointed out, in passing, that the survival of the fittest need not imply the survival of the best.

The very idea that man was somehow imbued with a finer nature, that he was automatically drawn to higher ideals, that, in the words of Matthew Arnold, "Man hath all which nature *hath, but more,*" *came* increasingly to be questioned by a world still capable of feeling shock at the monstrous cruelties of which man was capable.

And so we reach Snow, *perhaps* the most quintessential middle-brow writer of his generation who, in 1959, opened up the on-going debate aboute the responsibilities of both scientists and other *intellectuals in his provocative* Rede lecture. Sadly, though prabably inevitably, the problems he raised have yet to be resolved.

Mursi Saad El-Din

The Hoopoe

By Mahmoud Darwish

We have not come close yet to the land
of our distant star. The poem takes us/
through the eye of our needle to weave
for the skies a cloak of the new horizon./
captives, even if our ears of corn were to
leap across the high walls, even if the
swallow were to fly/
from our broken chains, captives of
what we love, what we want and what
we become.../
But within us is a hoopoe dictating letters to the olive of exile./
Our messages returned to us our messages, so that we would write anew/
the primitive blossoms rains write on
rocks of the distant/
and so that travel would travel — the
echo from us to us. We were not basil /
to be returned to our small windows in
spring. We were not leaves/
to be taken to our shores by the winds.
Here and there is an obvious line/
for wandering. *How many* years will we
hold up our dead as mirrors to the sweet
mystery?/
How many times will we make the
wounded carry the mountains of salt to
find the commandments?/
Our messages returned to us our messages. Here and there is an obvious *line*/
for shadows. How many seas will we
cross in the desert? How many scrolls
will we forget?/
How many prophets will we murder in
our high noon? And how many peoples
will we resemble to become /
a tribe? That way, our way, reeds on
words, mending/
the hem of the cloak separating our desolation from the land as it recedes and
sleeps/
in the saffron of our sunset. Let us then
open out like a hand to *lift up* our time
to the gods.../
I am a hoopoe — *said* the guide to the
Master of all things — I search for a lost
sky./
There is nothing left of us in the wild
except what the wild finds/
of us: the remains of skin on thorns, the
warrior's song for home/
and the mouth of the void. Before us our
traces. Behind us the shells of coincidence .../
I am a hoopoe — *the guide said to us* —
and flew with the rays and the dust./
[...]
Perchance/
one day we may fly ... People are birds
that do not fly.
[...]
Before us our traces. Behind us our traces. And here and there.
[...]
Are we the skin of the earth? We used,
when we bit the rocks, to open/
a space for jasmine. We *used to shelter*
ourselves in God from God's guards and
from wars./
We used to believe what the words
taught us. Poetry used to fall/
from the fruits of our night, leading our
goats to the pasture on the road to the
vineyards./
Dawn was blue, soft and cool. We used,
when we *dreamt, to find* enough/
in the space of our home: we would see
honey in the honeycomb, and harvest it.
See/
in sleep the sesame squares swollen, and
sift them. See/
in sleep what is to be seen at dawn.
[...]
I am a hoopoe — said the guide — and
flew from us. The words *flew*/
from us. The deluge was before us. We
did not shed the clothes of earth from
us./
The deluge was before us. We did not
begin the wars of self yet. The deluge/
was before us. We did not harvest the
barley of our yellow plains yet./
The deluge was before us. We did not
burnish our rocks *with ram's horns yet.*/
The deluge was before us. We did not
despair of apples yet.
[...]
The hoopoe said: Leave
behind your bodies to
follow me, leave behind
the earth-the mirage/
to follow me. Leave your
names. Do not ask *me for*
an answer./
The answer is the way
and there is no way but
to vanish in the mist./
[...]
The drunken hoopoe
said: Fly that you may fly. We are merely lovers./
We said: We have wearied of the whiteness of love, we long for a mother, land
and a father./
Are we *what we were and* what we will
be? The hoopoe said: Become one in
every path./
evaporate to arrive at what the senses
cannot reach. And each heart/
is a universe of secrets. Fly that you may
fly. We are merely lovers./
We *said, after death* many times, after
ecstacy many times: We are merely lovers./
Longing is exile. Our love is exile. Our
wine is exile. And exile/
is the history of this heart. How many
times/
have we said to the scent of place: turn
into stone that we may sleep. How many
times/
have we said to the trees of place pare
away *the embellishments of conquests*
that we may find place./
Place travelling far away from its history
into the soul is no place.../
The soul carrying us away from our land
to reach the beloved is exile./
The land carrying us away from our soul
to reach *the stranger* is exile./
No sword remains that did not find its
sheath in our flesh./
Our brother enemies saddled the horses
of the enemy that they may exit our
dreams./
The past is an exile: we have plucked
the peaches of our joy *from the barren*
summer./
Thoughts are an exile: we saw tomorrow under the windows, and we
pierced/
the walls of our present to reach it: it became a past in the shield of an ancient
soldier./
Poetry is an exile once we dream and,
waking, forget where we were./
[...]
I am a hoopoe — said the guide. We
said: we are a flock of birds./
The words have tired of us and we,
thirsting, tired of them and we were dispersed by the echo./
Till when will we fly? The drunken hoopoe said: Distance is our end./
We said: And what is beyond? He said:
distance is beyond distance is beyond
distance./
We said: we have grown weary. He
said: you will not find a pine tree to rest.
In vain/
you ask for descent, so soar that you
may soar. We said: tomorrow/
we will fly again... for the earth is a
swollen breast sucked by
this mist./
is gold rubbing the blue
shimmering around our
houses. Did she have/
all that within her without us knowing? We will
return when we return to
see her/
with insight, transformed
by the eyes of our hoopoe.
[...]
Our mother is our mother./
mother of the Athenians, Persians,
mother of Plato, Zarathustra, Plotinus,
mother of Sahrawardi./
mother of all. Every child is a master in
his mother. For her the beginning and
the end./
She is what she is: birth if she wills and,
if she wills, holy death./
You fed us then ate us O mother to feed
our children O mother. Is there no weaning?/
[...]
- *Did you know what sort of crown* you
carried on your head?/
- My mother's grave.
As I fly I carry my mother, a festival on
my head, secrets and news ...
[...]
We are now what we were, have returned/
unwillingly to myths that cannot contain us. *We could neither*/
milk the goats near our houses nor arrange the days around our song./
For us, there, are temples, and here for
us a god glorified by a martyr./
And for us, of flowers, there is night-musk shunned by day that wants it
not./
For us a life in the life of others. For
us, here, wheat and oil./
We have not untied our tent from the
willow, nor have we made of/
sulphur gods to be worshipped by the
soldiers drawing near. We have found/
all things prepared: our names broken in
the clay/
jar ... our women's tears stains of old
mulberry on/
cloth ... the old hunting rifles... and a
past celebration we cannot recollect./
The desolate land is replete with traces
of human absence. As if we were here./
Here are tools enough to pitch a tent on
the winds./
not to brand the mark of the deluge on
the craggy mountain with green edges./
Inside us are a thousand peoples who
have passed between the songs and the
arrows./
We came to learn that we came to return
from an absence we do not want./
For us a life we did not try, and salt
whose *immortality did not immortalise.*/
And for us footsteps no one before us
has taken... so fly/
fly, then, O birds in the spaces of this
heart fly/
and gather round our hoopoe, and fly...
that... you may fly.

Illustrations: George Bahgory

Extracts from "Al-Hudhud", collected in Ara Ma Ourid (I See What I Want), *Beirut, 1991.*



Translated by **Mona Anis** *and* **Nur Elmessiri**

Clean up the world, start in Old Cairo

Students and residents cleaning the streets? Mahmoud Bakr examines an environmental campaign that starts small, but aims big



AOYE members and inhabitants of El-Dayoura in Old Cairo begin the battle: Small steps, big results *photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid*

Big business and wealthy *industrialists* are often rightly accused of wreaking the greatest environmental havoc. But that chocolate wrapper thrown negligently out the window, or the long-abandoned garbage tip, are smaller, more manageable targets for eradication. For initiatives which seek to combine the state, the private sector, and local grassroots labour, cleaning up the city and preserving the environment are targets which can only be achieved one step at a time — starting in your own back yard.

The Clean Up the World campaign was launched on 30 September. In Egypt, it began under the sponsorship of Nadia Makram Ebeid, the state minister for environmental affairs, as part of an effort to coordinate grassroots efforts with the government and the private sector and thus preserve the environment. The campaign was organised in Egypt by the Arab Office for Youth and Environment (AOYE), in cooperation with the gov*ernorate of Cairo, within the framework of an* international project organised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and with the collaboration of the Australian government.

Emadeddin Adli, AOYE chairman, spoke about this year's plan, part of which will be an "on the ground" programme to set a good example for citizens' behaviour. Groups of *young people will set about cleaning the* streets and collecting refuse. The second section of the plan includes visiting homes, talking with families to instil an awareness of environmental concerns, and discussing means of improving health care at home and in the surrounding environment. This will also help to encourage participation between citizens, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the community institutions involved in cleaning up the environment and improving health *services through the supply of potable* water, sanitary drainage, solid waste disposal, the reduction of pollution, and the allocation of green areas.

Since the Clean Up the World campaign began in 1993, the AOYE has sought to win support among the general public of the 110-odd *participating countries. The first campaign organised in Egypt by the AOYE provided assistance to the earthquake victims at* Ain Helwan and was conducted by AOYE members with the participation of the inhabitants of the area.

In 1994, the second campaign began in Ismailia, while the third campaign, launched the following year, included Suez, Sharm El-Sheikh and the Gulf of Aqaba. In 1996, El-Dayoura, in Fustat, Old Cairo, was targeted for the group's activities. The same area was chosen again this year, due to its touristic and *historical value*, and *also due to the fact that* the AOYE is currently engaged in implementing an urban environment development project, in association with Cairo Governorate and the Local Initiative Authority for the Urban Environment.

El-Nagdi Hagar, an engineer and the gener*al supervisor of the project, said that more* than 150 young members of the National *Team for Youth and the Environment, joined* by university students and the inhabitants of the area, are participating in the Clean Up the World campaign. Governor of Cairo Abdel-Rahim Shehata is also offering support. The campaign's aim is to change behaviour at the grassroots level.

The AOYE celebrated Arab Environment Day on 14 October. In keeping with its aim of cleaning up Cairo, one neighbourhood at a time, this year's focus is the idea that sorting *rubbish at the source for recycling yields both* profit and protection.

If more aware attitudes are fostered, this could lead to the preservation of the environment, the elimination of some pollution problems, and the short-term objective of creating a clean environment in the area where the *campaign is underway.*

Putting the environment on-line

Exciting news for green activists and researchers alike: by the beginning of the century, all the information they need will be in one place. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

Working with a budget of 14 mil*lion Canadian dollars, the Egyptian* Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have taken the first steps towards the creation of an Environmental Information System, *considered the environmental pro*ject of the century in Egypt.

The CIDA is helping the EEAA to develop an Egyptian Environmental Information System (EIS), to be implemented in three phases, the first of which is targeted for completion by the end of 1999. The system will group all the available information about water, land and air resources in Egypt. Such information, while currently available in different government agencies, is not presented in a unified, easily accessible form, a situation which makes it practically impossible to gather accurate, comprehensive information on a given topic. For instance, in order to gather information about the quality of drinking water, you would have to visit several ministries and institutes: the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources, and the *Ministry of Agriculture*. Assembling all the available information about Egypt's natural heritage, therefore, will help decision-makers in Egypt take informed measures when in comes to improving environmental conditions.

Egyptian decision-makers, concerned about the future of the environment, wanted to draw up a five-year action plan which is to *extend from 1998 to 2003. In a bid* to help them, the Egyptian government asked the Canadian development agency to help them set up the EIS. According to Dr Mosaad Allam, project executive manager at the CIDA, the idea for the project was first mooted in 1991, when the Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) requested the Canadian government to assist Egypt in developing an environmental database. "The Canadian International Development Agency sent two missions between October 1991 and February '92, to evaluate the possibility of establishing an EIS, gathering all the data in Egypt, and estimating whether or not Egypt is ready for this type of information technology." Allam added that the Canadian government agreed to the project "in early '93, on the condition that Egypt issues an environment law. This *measure was taken, and Law 4 for* 1994 was promulgated."

Immediately after the law was enacted, in 1995, Egypt and Canada signed the cooperation protocol. *The goal of the EIS is to* enhance the EEAA's capacity to retrieve, process, analyse and disseminate environmental information for decision-makers in Egypt. This, in turn, will improve their ability to formulate and im*plement a framework of timely* and appropriate environmental policies, legislation, programmes and projects, thus positively affecting the prospects for sustainable development within the next decade.

The project was awarded to three Canadian companies. One is a consultant engineering service specialising in information systems and environment, the second is a mapping company, and the last specialises in computer and information systems. On the Egyptian side, the EEAA is the sole representative, and will provide labour, data, and software or hardware if necessary.

The first *stage* of the project, scheduled to end by December '99, is a rationalisation project aiming to form a local network inside the EEAA which will connect all its different sectors and the information at their disposal — in*formation which they still do not* share. "This will eliminate redundancy and duplication in the information available to the EEAA, and will allow them to complete the data where information is missing," says Allam. After this step has been completed, five nodes (single workstations or a local area network of workstations) of governmental agencies or ministries, as well as giant projects *implemented by donors* like DANIDA, USAID, and the World Bank, will be linked up. The five agencies have not yet been chosen, but, according to Allam, they will include the Ministry of Public Works and Water Management, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, "and we are hoping to include the General Organisation of Industrialisation, or the Cairo Waste Water Authority."

By 2001, all the ministries and agencies should be linked up in 13 nodes, including four agencies from the Ministry of Public Works, three from the Ministry of Agriculture, two from the Ministry *of Health*, and one from the Ministry of Industry. The second phase of the project will also include governorates, perhaps Giza or Alexandria. The Ministry of Housing will also be included.

The agencies, however, while *linked to EEAA*, "will also *nego*tiate a protocol to establish a data-sharing system which will allow any of the individual agencies to obtain information from another agency *directly*," *said* Allam. "Hopefully, in the future, we may also connect universities and research institutions." Allam added that most of the agencies already have computers, but may or may not have database management *systems*, "*so we will provide those* agencies with the required hardware and software, to establish such systems." Since most of the ministries already have qualified staff, the CIDA will provide training only to the EEAA staff.

Eventually, all existing data on Egypt's natural heritage will be available on the Internet, but behind a firewall. Only metadata (the general content of the information behind the firewall), as well as the information released by the various agencies and ministries for public use, will be accessible to the general public.

This is good news for reporters and researchers *alike*, who will have easy access to all the information they need about the Egyptian environment. They do not have to wait until 2001, however. They can begin obtaining it from the EEAA by the end of next year, *when the local network is installed.* All the information at this agency's disposal — a considerable amount — will then be at their disposal.

Pot Pourri

Time is money

As supermarkets replace *souqs*, a new style of shopping has evolved, and many consumers now can hardly remember the days when bargaining skills were among a good housewife's most prized qualities.

I used to have endless discussions with my late husband on the subject. These skills, he claimed, were inherited and I, *obviously*, had not received my full share at birth. He, on the other hand, had been born with a special gift, which — probably combined with his mother's excessive parsimony — had made him perfectly qualified to do the household's shopping. I was only too happy to bow to his expertise and, admitting that I was woefully unqualified for the task, I let him fill the refrigerator on a regular basis. I took over other *areas to which he* was less partial. This division of labour saved us a great deal of money — as I was to find out later — and many an unpleasant argument. When my husband died, however, I was left to fend for myself in a department in which, sadly, I had acquired no experience over the years.

At first, I tried the local *souq* and attempted to emulate my husband's haughty ways and the air of pensive disgust he routinely adopted while aggressively manipulating the fruit and vegetables, a practice I secretly found shocking, but one he had always gotten away with. A couple of rather scandalous encounters with very rude merchants, which soon degenerated into *shouting matches*, convinced me, however, that this was definitely not going to be my style. I decided to go in search of another market, one to which I was a total newcomer, and tried to ingratiate myself with the vendors. I abstained from examining the merchandise and proffered the required cash silently. I was dissuaded from carrying the experiment much further by the sheer amount of food that *went directly* from my shopping bag to the garbage bin.

My husband had always warned me against supermarkets. Highway robbers, he used to call them; "and who do you think is paying for their fancy installations?" he would demand. Even abroad, he *had always managed to find little* out-of-the-way shops, which, he used to say, sold fresher merchandise at half the price — and where touching and sniffing before buying were not entirely frowned-upon practices.

Having failed to apply my husband's tried-and-true methods with any measure of success, and with no hope of ever improving, I *finally decided that the time had come to un*dertake the unthinkable, and start shopping without having to part with my self-esteem every time I purchased a kilo of tomatoes. A supermarket had just opened on our street. One sunny morning, not without trepidation, I crossed its threshold.

My life changed. Why had I not been told that shopping *for groceries was actually a pleasant experience*? Of course my food bills rocketed, but what price is peace? For years I enjoyed most-favoured-client status at my local supermarket. I had been in denial for so long that I went overboard to catch up.

I was never reluctant to try new items or accept (usually more expensive) replacements for my favourite brands. If a purchase I *was sure* I had paid for went missing, I immediately assumed that I had decided against buying it. If I discovered that the fruit I had selected had been surreptitiously replaced with a wilted equivalent, I forgot to complain. After all, *I told myself*, I am saving so much time and bother by buying everything in the same place. What are a couple of rotten apples in comparison?

Recently, however, the honeymoon came to an unexpected and abrupt halt, as, while filling my basket, I casually remarked to an attendant that the same brand of pasta sold for much cheaper at the newly opened supermarket around the corner. A heated exchange ensued. The manager was summoned. At first, he tried to convince me that I had made a mistake. Getting muddled up in his own explanations, he lost his temper and quickly became as argumentative as the *souq* vendors, and every bit as rude. I resented him more, because he was less genuine and definitely had fewer reasons to fight so hard for a few piastres. I left my purchases *on the counter, vowing never to return.*

At first, I was at a loss. I took time to explore, however, visiting different shops in different areas. I discovered that there were huge differences in prices, quality and service. Many well-established outfits have stopped caring for their clients. Their employees look ironically on, while shoppers struggle with badly-stacked shelves which threaten to come tumbling *down at the slightest provocation. New super*markets, on the other hand, are eager to please. I visit those frequently, but apply the principle that absence makes the heart grow fonder. I periodically disappear, then reappear suddenly. I now have a complete repertoire of places for my shopping ventures and I even visit the *souqs* as well, on occasion. I must have acquired the arrogant air of the practiced buyer, because I get the respect I deserve. It *certainly takes* me longer to do the groceries but, I suspect, my late husband would not disapprove.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Broccoli with cheese

Ingredients:
1 kg broccoli
1 small onion (grated)
2 cups cream cheese spread (240 gms each)
1 block Danish blue cheese
3 cups milk
2 tbsp. white flour
3 tbsp. grated mozzarella
2 tbsp. butter
pepper

Method:
Boil or steam the broccoli. Season with a dash of pepper and leave aside. Coat an oven dish with butter and put in the broccoli. In a cooking pan, melt the butter, add the onion and gently fry it only until yellowish. Add the flour and stir until you develop a dough-like consistency. Remove from *heat* and add the blue cheese. Stir until it melts. Add the cream *cheese and stir until contents* blend well together. Place the pan back over medium heat. Add the milk gradually whilst stirring. Blend well then pour over the broccoli. Sprinkle the mozzarella on top. Stick in the oven for ten *minutes. Serve* with a pot roast and a green salad.

N.B. Do not use any salt in this recipe

Moushira Abdel Malek

Restaurant review

Deli belly

Andrew Steele encounters pizzas and porkers

It may not be a real one, but it is as close as one's going to get. A delicatessen, in Cairo, *that is*. The rightly famous Maison Thomas sits in the south wing of the part of Behler Mansions in Zamalek that borders on 26 July Street. It is small, but airy, and has all the trappings of its more ostentatiously-stocked European counterparts. Bunches of dried bell peppers vie for wall space with flaking heads of garlic. There are urns bearing dried flower arrangements the Women's Institute would be proud of. There is also a rather peculiar mural, of a place setting at an unfeasibly large dining table. A *flight of* wrought-iron steps leads up to a larder-like section, out of bounds to Joe Public. This would appear to be the Thomas storeroom. Dry goods could be glimpsed peeking lasciviously from behind cupboard doors.

I'm not a big fan of a stool as a place of repose, and *if it's a high one, then more's* the pity. High, black and minimalist are the stools of the Thomas establishment, off*setting the stripped* wooden floorboards and matching the similarly crafted tables. Renowned for its swift and efficient delivery service, this is not the venue for a leisurely lunch. More the sort of place to stop for a nibble and a slurp whilst enduring the rigours of a Zamalek shopping expedition, or *for an* early morning stoking before the working day begins.

The menu covers an eclectic selection of salads, hot and cold sandwiches, burgers, pizzas, more substantial dishes and home-made cakes (whoever heard of bought cake in a delicatessen?). Having just recovered from a strenuous taxi journey, I decided that a pizza might be just the ticket. The lunch ticket, that is. Prepared before my very eyes, the pizza went into the oven looking as though it was about to be a graduate of the Italian school of pizza making — flat and cheesy, with more than a whiff of herb, drizzled generously with olive oil. It emerged about 15 minutes later, confirming its promise. Dare I say it? The best pizza in town? Yum, and indeed, yum.

The selection of goodies at the goodly *Maison goes further, however. Pleasing* cheeses (always a good Brie) and local wines, beers and liquors struggle for display space with a consummate selection of pork products.

I made the mistake of consuming a large bottle of mineral water in its entirety whilst *gobbling lunch. Maison Thomas* has no lavatory, not even a privy out the back, so be warned, ye of small bladders, a large and liquid accompaniment to your plate of choice is ill advised, unless you fancy a necessary nip to the less than salubrious (these days, anyhow) Charmerie across the way.

A rather good venue, all told, for a swift and wholesome lunch. A regular size Pizza Funghi and a bottle of mineral water came to a definitely reasonable LE23. Bring your own latrines.

Maison Thomas, 157 26th of July Street, Zamalek
Tel: 3407057

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across
1. Scorch (4)
5. Abode of the righteous dead; nirvana (5)
10. Water obstacles (4)
14. Know-how (4)
15. French love (5)
16. The Green Isle (4)
17. Thought (4)
18. Have a burst of energy (5)
19. *Quote* (4)
20. Hymns (6)
22. Body of 5 senior magistrates of Ancient Greece (8)
24. Grasped (4)
26. Scandinavian monetary unit (3)
27. Underneath (5)
30. Period of time (3)
33. Titillate (5)
37. Authenticate (4)
38. Dares; challenges (6)
40. Tune (3)
41. Textile fabric with corded surface, pl. (4)
42. Embark; force one's way into (5)
43. Jai... (4)
44. Poetic for "before" (3)
45. Seeing (6)
46. Destruction (4)
47. Play carelessly on stringed instrument (5)
49. Diary; keep an account (3)
50. *In astronomy: period of* years between repetition of eclipse (5)
51. Edge (3)
53. Part of QED (4)
55. Rashness (8)
60. All (6)
64. Incite (4)
65. Condemnations (5)
67. One pound, sl. (4)
68. Mechanical repetition (4)
69. Spiny shrub growing on wasteland (5)
70. Frosts (4)
71. Male ant (4)
72. Cast one's ballot (5)
73. Playboy (4)

Down
1. Fasten together (4)
2. Troughs for carrying bricks, coal, etc. (4)
3. Region (4)
4. Estate agents (8)
5. Rope with running noose (5)
6. Mischievous child (3)
7. Pout, Fr. (4)
8. Belch (4)
9. Comb. form "rectangular", "upright" or "straight" (5)
10. Adjudge; fiat (6)
11. Solo song (4)
12. Sport's glove (4)
13. Dutch knife (4)
21. Garden chore (3)
23. Crumbs (4)
25. Central and edible part of *nut* (6)
27. Denudes (5)
28. Turn inside out (5)
29. Lazar (5)
31. Proportion (5)
32. Repay; vindicate (6)
34. Of the cheek (5)
35. Music: *subdued*; performed softly (5)
36. Endeavours (5)
38. Arab title of respect (3)
39. Unit of work (3)
43. Slaughter house (8)
45. Arab title of respect (5)
48. Anatomical duct (6)
50. ...Remo (3)
52. Small gnat-like fly (5)
54. Arrange again (5)
55. Village in Ireland (4)
56. Dark wood (4)
57. Boundary; allot (4)
58. Kit (4)
59. Formerly (4)
61. An Indian of Peru (4)
62. Stench (4)
63. Gaelic language (4)
66. A university high degree, abb. (3)

Last week's solution

Turkish delight



The Saffron Palace's past remains mysterious, but a few of its secrets, like exotic sweets, can be carefully extracted from their crinkly wrappings. **Fayza Hassan** samples a historical delicacy; **Randa Shaath** captures it on camera



It was Khedive Abbas Helmi I, known mainly for a tendency to misanthropy and his distaste for the intervention of foreign powers in Egypt's affairs, who chose to develop the desert area of El-Ridaniya, later rebaptised El-Abbassiya. He built himself a large palace, then divided the remaining land into large plots, to be given to members of the court on the condition that they would build important residences at once. Palaces sprouted thus fast amid the fields of saffron. After Abbas's death, however, Abbassiya slowly lost its appeal as those close to the palace moved nearer to the centre of power.

Today, one small palace still bears a name reminiscent of the fields of spicy herbs which once covered what is today the grounds of Ain Shams University: Zaafarnn Palace, which houses the administration of Ain Shams University and has been swallowed up by the campus. The origins of this palace are rather obscure; the more popular version holds that Khedive Ismail built it for his mother Kushyiar, while, according to other stories, it was yet one more palace which the khedive had built to host Eugenie. "But," says historian Mohamed Abul-Amayem, "the Zaafaran Palace was constructed much later than the opening of the Suez Canal. It was built on the site of another palace and can be dated, according to archival material, to the time of Abbas Helmi II."

In "Un Architecte Face à l'Orient: Antoine Lasciac (1856-1946)", published in *La Fuite en Egypte* (supplement to the *Voyages Europeens en Orient*), Mercedes Volait lists the Zaafaran Palace as having been commissioned by the khedival family and designed by Lasciac. This would confirm Prince Hassan Hassan's version of how the palace came to be built. "When Khedive Ismail died in Istanbul, his three widows expressed the desire to return to Egypt. As they got along very well, they decided to live together and the palace was built for them," he affirms. Although it is said that the work was completed in 40 days, including the landscaping of the grounds, which featured a collection of beautiful trees and shrubs, this fact is hardly credible in view of the attention to detail Lasciac brought to his work.

The three-storey palace features a main reception area on the first floor with, on the right, a grand dining room and on the left two smaller reception rooms. On the second floor, eight bedrooms, each with its private Turkish bath, surround a cosy salon destined for less official gatherings. On the third floor, more bedrooms and bathrooms were reserved for the entourage. Abbas Helmi had entrusted the supervision of his palaces to his cousin Prince Fouad, and it is to him that the Zaafaran Palace reverted when Ismail's wives died. He apparently lived in this palace with his first wife, Princess Shewikar, and Princess Fawqia was probably born there.

In 1908, the palace was loaned to the Ministry of Education and housed the pupils of the Fouad I Boys' School; then, while Fouad I (now Cairo) University was being completed, it was used as its administrative building. In the '20s, the university administration was moved to Giza with the rest of the faculties and the palace reverted to King Fouad. Although King Farouk was officially born in Abdin Palace, a persisting rumour places his birth at Zaafaran, occupied at the time by the royal couple while Abdin was undergoing restorations. Since it was often said that Farouk was born long before the official announcement, one may well wonder about the stories circulated at the time, namely that Fouad did not actually marry Nazli before he had made certain that she would present him with an heir. Did he tuck away his future queen at Zaafaran until the royal birth took place?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs bought the palace in the mid-'20s to be used as a residence for lesser royal guests. It also housed semi-official venues, the most famous of which was the initialling of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty by the then prime minister, Mustafa El-Nahhas, who had just formed his third all-Wafd government, and Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner, whose title, following the signing of the treaty, was changed to that of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Egypt.

In 1939, the Shahpur of Iran, on his official visit to ask for the hand of Princess Fawzia, stayed at the Zaafaran Palace, where a farewell dinner for the royal wedding party was held in the large dining room before the couple departed for Tehran.

During the '40s, the palace housed many of the Arab heads of state who had come to Egypt for the Arab League meetings. A former student at the Faculty of Science of Fouad University, the last faculty to be moved to Giza, remembers jumping over a small wall to sit and study peacefully under a tree on the extensive grounds of the palace, and observing from her vantage point the comings and goings of various dignitaries, who were often gracious enough to sign her autograph book. In 1951, Ibrahim I (later Ain Shams) University was founded and soon took over the buildings surrounding the palace. By the '60s, the palace itself had been occupied by the university's proliferating faculties and the first floor was transformed into administrative offices, including the university president's office.

During one of the student protests of the '70s, Ain Shams University students staged a sit-in in the president's office, which at the time was located in one of the smaller reception rooms. As the protest spread, the students occupied the whole palace. A number of those who participated remember that, off the kitchen, in the basement, a door led to an underground tunnel which was half blocked at the time. Originally, this tunnel used to connect the palace to the railway station of Manshiet El-Sadr. While the students did not venture deep into the tunnel, the police eventually found and used the entrance at the other end to make an unexpected appearance inside the palace and catch the protesters totally unprepared.

Today, the Zaafaran Palace, still the administrative building of Ain Shams University, has been restored to its original splendour. The work has been carried out according to period pictures. The guided tour does not include a visit of the tunnel, however; nor is any reference made to student unrest. The splendid winter garden, a symbol of gracious living, covers two of the three storeys, the greenery set off by the huge, multi-coloured stained-glass window. The walls and woodwork are painted in sweet pastels, picked out with gold trimmings, while, on the ceilings of the president's offices, fluffy white clouds sail across bright blue skies. Copies of period furniture and rich satin drapes are coordinated to the colours of the walls, while the reconstructed parquet floors are covered with machine versions of ancient Persian carpets. It seems incongruous indeed to imagine that such surroundings ever witnessed anything more violent than a few debutantes' balls, a couple of innocuous diplomatic encounters and maybe a conference of academics, feeling slightly out of place in so much pink and gold.

Standing on the first floor landing, one has a panoramic view of the stained-glass window, the tubs of hothouse plants and the majestic marble staircase. Further away, the garden — which once covered a larger area — resplendent with numerous species of rare palm trees, under which tens of cars are parked, is an incongruous reminder that dusty, noisy Khalifa El-Ma'moun, one of Cairo's busiest thoroughfares, is just around the corner. The visit is over, but one is left with the impression of having stepped, by magic, into a de luxe box of Turkish delights.

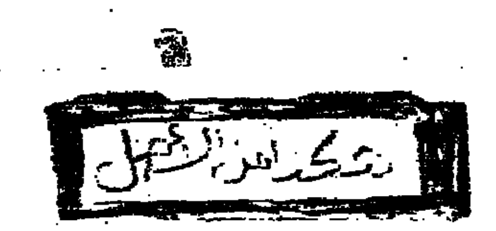


Illustrious guest: The Shahpur of Iran stayed at the Zaafaran Palace when he came to Cairo to officially ask for the hand of Princess Fawzia, King Farouk's sister. Here, a delegation is awaiting the young prince to take him to Abdin Palace
photo: courtesy of Maged Farag









Zamalek managed an encouraging 2-0 victory over Tunisia's Africain in the African Championship League, but Mansoura sadly failed to qualify for the finals of the Cup Winners Championship. **Abeer Anwar** tucks away her handkerchief and reports





Zamalek (in white) moved on in the African Championship League, whereas Mansoura (in white) failed to qualify for the finals of the African Cup Winners Cup *photos: Mohamed Wassim and Medhat Abdel-Meguid*

Hope in Zamalek, disappointment in Mansoura

Zamalek halted a run of three consecutive defeats in the African Championship League by defeating Tunisia's Africain 2-0 in Cairo. The Arab Contractors stadium was witness to an encounter in which Zamalek were the better team in every way. *Zamalkawis* have had a lot to cry about after their team's recent weak performance on the African front, but they were more than happy with this new line-up under the leadership of their captain and top star, Ismail Youssef. Ruud Kroll, Zamalek's new coach, was able to counter critics of the team's recent "decline" by giving an outing to a number of juniors whose youth and skill reinvigorated the side. Kroll still seems to be trying to prove all those people wrong who hounded him until he quit his post with the Egyptian national team. If so, perhaps he's beginning to get his point across.

Zamalek, who have won the leading continental club event a record four times, now have six points after five rounds, one less that Group B leaders, Obuasi Goldfields of Ghana. Against Africain, they were able to control the game from the very beginning, and did not give their opponents a single opportunity to score or even take a shot at goal. Ayman Abdel-Aziz converted a 42nd-minute penalty kick to put Zamalek ahead in the North African derby, and Mohamed Ramadan scored the second nine minutes into the second half. This victory seemed to confirm Kroll's wisdom in axing such long-serving players as Ahmed El Kas, after the disastrous results that had preceded in the Championship League. Zamalek had followed an unimpressive home win over Ferroviario from Mozambique in the opening round, with two-goal defeats away to Africain, Goldfields and Ferroviario. Now, after beating Africain, there is a chance they may yet qualify for the final round of the tournament. But the final decision as to which two teams go forward must wait on the result of the remaining match between Goldfields and Ferroviario.

After the match, Kroll commented: "I am happy with the team's performance. I think that the key to their victory lay in the players' desire to win. They did not give Africain a chance." They also invented a new form of celebration, as they stood on the field in a circle and saluted their captain Ibrahim Youssef, before going to thank the fans and spectators who had filled the stadium.

Meanwhile, Mansoura forfeited their chance of reaching the finals of the African Cup Winners Cup. They were eliminated after defeating Etoile du Sahel 4-2 at home. They had lost 3-0 to Etoile in the first leg, and needed to win 4-1 or 4-0 to go through, but Etoile managed to score the two goals they needed to qualify. Etoile took Mansoura by surprise, scoring their first goal in the 15th minute of the first half. "We thought that Etoile would choose to defend the points they had already, and not go on the attack, but they tricked us," Hassan Megahed, Mansoura's technical manager, said afterwards.

Mansoura equalised in the 19th minute of the first half and went on to score again in the 30th and 42nd minutes, through Walid Salaheddin and Ayman Moheb. But although this meant the home team was in with a chance, Etoile were not going to give up their prey so easily. It was Emad Ben Yunis who shattered Mansoura's hopes in the 43rd minute of the first half. Mansoura would not lie down either, and they scored again in the 49th minute of the first half. But when they came back out for the second half, they seemed to have lost the faith that had carried them so far, and Etoile had no problem in closing the game down and hanging on to their aggregate advantage.

"This was the first time Mansoura had qualified for the African Cup Winners Cup. I think that to score 4 goals and qualify to play in the semi-finals is a great honour for Mansoura and a great achievement, even if we were unable to go on and finish the job," Megahed commented.

Although the Tunisians had only brought 100 supporters with them, their vocal support throughout the game gave a great lift to their team's performance.

Pulling their weight

The Egyptian disabled weightlifting team were guests of honour at this year's European Championships, where they put their hosts firmly in their place — by coming first

As stars who have shone in various world championships, as well as at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the Egyptian disabled weightlifting team were invited by the European Disabled Weightlifting Federation to take part as special guests in this year's European Championship, **Abeer Anwar** reports. Although it was the first time the Egyptians had participated in such an event, they were able to show that their world supremacy easily encompassed Europe. They collected 9 gold medals, 2 silver and 1 bronze to come first with 72 points, followed by Poland with 62, Australia with 39 and Germany with 38.

This was also the first time the Egyptian Federation had entered a women's weightlifting team in an international event. Their coach, Ali El-Arabi, explained: "We discovered that some Egyptian disabled women were good enough to compete in international events, thanks to their muscular strength and the kind of points they could achieve." Both teams, men and women, were selected through the national weightlifting championship. "We did not choose the players that came top, but the ones that scored points that were near or equal to European standards," El-Arabi added. However, the Federation did require that those selected for the team be classed in the first three places in their category.



Lifting weights in their training *photo: Aref Saadeddin*

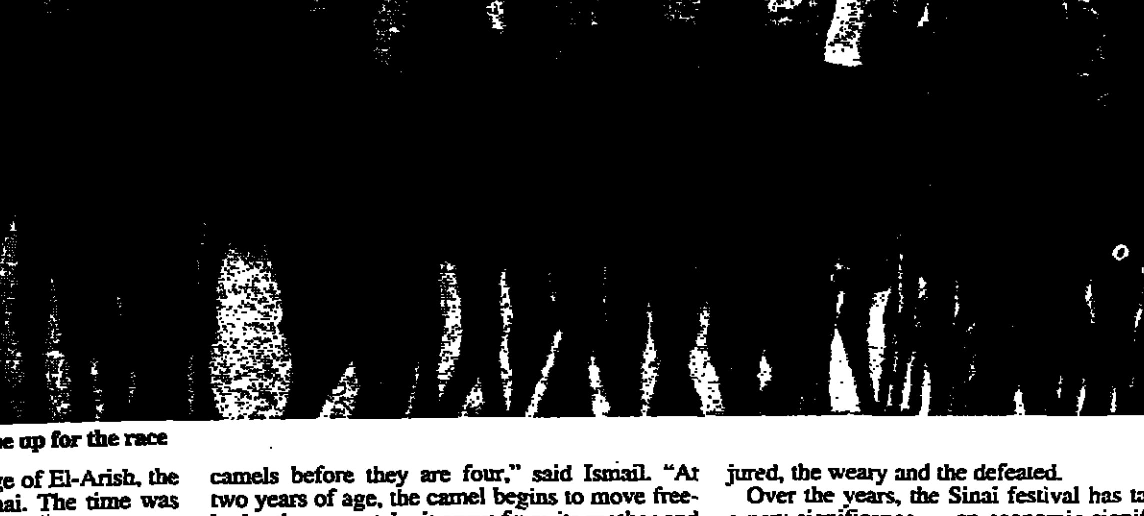
The Egyptian men's team had seven members, six of whom came back from Europe with gold medals: Talaat El-Tahoon (under 52kg), Ahmed Gomaa (under 56kg), Metwalli Mathana (under 60kg), Emad Bahgat (under 67.5kg), Mustafa Fadloun (under 75kg) and Abdel-Moneim Salah (under 82.5kg). Gomaa broke his own world record of 181kg twice, on his second and third trials. The new records he set were 183kg and 186kg. The seventh member of the team was Sherif El-Dereni, a junior, who was taking part in an international competition for the first time. He was placed fifth in his category. Teams from 26 countries, including Poland, England, France, Norway and Slovakia, participated in the men's event.

In the women's event, there were eleven countries represented. The Egyptian womens' team had 6 members. They came away with six medals: 3 gold, 2 silver and 1 bronze. The gold medalists were Fatma Omar (under 44kg), Abeer Ibrahim (under 48kg) and Hend Abdel-Atti (under 82kg). The silver medals went to Nadia Fekry (under 75kg) and Faten Hegazy (over 82kg). Sayeda Mohamed took bronze (under 67.5kg).

The Egyptian teams had prepared for the event through a two-week closed camp at the Olympic Center in Maadi. Commenting on the teams' achievements, Hossam Mustafa, secretary of the Egyptian Disabled Weightlifting Federation, commented: "It is a great achievement, especially since these players are now ready to go on both to the World Championship in December 1998, which will be held in either the Emirates or Florida, and to the Sydney Paralympics."

On my hump

The North Sinai Desert is not always as empty as you might think. *Last week, the only* place to be was the 5th National Camel Race. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** comes down off her hump to *tell it like it was*



Line up for the race

The setting was the desert fringe of El-Arish, the provincial capital of North Sinai. The time was the last week of October. The event was a race. But this was not the Grand National, and the jockeys, like most of the punters, were Bedouins, not British. This was the Fifth National Camel Race.

El-Arish has turned a private Bedouin tradition into something of a major festival drawing enthusiasts from far and wide. Bedouins grow up riding camels, not kicking tin cans around, and the annual El-Arish races are their equivalent of the League Cup. The race, which was first held seven years ago, is for thoroughbred camels only — those that are descended from a specific blood-line. This isn't Crufts, though: these are thoroughbreds with attitude. Khaina camels, for instance, are known as "traitors", because they get off to a slow start, but break from the pack near the end to win the race.

This is the fifth year the race has been held as an official competition. 300 camels representing 13 different Bedouin tribes from North and South Sinai, Ismailia and El-Sharqiya came together to see who was the best.

"Before they became a formal competition, the races and the recitals of poetry that accompany them were mainly staged as part of other social events, such as marriages," said Maher Ismail, senior press officer to the Sinai Camel race at the North Sinai Governorate. "Now the aim of holding the races is to help the tribes improve their standard in relation to the Arab tribes who they'll be competing against in November." Even camel racing has to move with the times, and let itself be "organised". How long before it's the JVC National Camel Race, the Reebok Ruminants World Cup?

Egyptian Bedouins begin training their camels at the age of four. "We can't start training the camels before they are four," said Ismail. "At two years of age, the camel begins to move freely, by three, we take it away from its mother and get it used to having a rider on its back. By four, it is ready to be trained for racing," he added. *Egyptian camels are fed an inexpensive diet of* wheat and barley. After the race, the price of the winning camels can reach LE70,000.

To be eligible to participate in the race, the camels must be between four and nine years old. As the date of birth of most camels is not recorded, the Bedouin look at their teeth to determine their age. Three and four-year-old camels do one circuit of the 5km-oval track. The five-year-old camels run 8kms, seven and eight-year-old camels run 10kms. There is also a race for eight and nine-year-old horses over 13kms. Racing camels generally have "cruising" speeds of between 12 and 18 km/hr. The winner in each event takes prize monies of LE1,000. The runner-up gets LE900 and third place LE750. When the governor of North Sinai, Ali Hefzi, distributed the prizes, he particularly asked the owners of the winning camels to take good care of them, as they will go on to represent Egypt in next month's international camel races against other Arab and African nations.

But the races themselves are only one small part of the event. Before and after the competition, the Bedouins sit in the sun reciting their traditional poetry and recalling with pride the noble bloodlines of some of the competing camels. Unlike their weaker but more famous counterparts who carry tourists past the Pyramids, these are the offspring of a breed of "warrior" camels who braved mines and missiles to carry soldiers across the desert during the 1967 and 1973 wars. In the 1967 war, it was the same camels who carried bombs on their humps, and who later on brought back the bodies of the injured, the weary and the defeated.

Over the years, the Sinai festival has taken on a new significance — an economic significance. While providing the Bedouin with an opportunity to celebrate their traditions and heritage, the races have also begun to draw large numbers of tourists from the Gulf countries. Prior to the race, the camels are put on diets to lower their weight and increase their speed. Indeed, many races are held in January, during the three month period where the camels are fasting.

At the track, a running commentary on the races was provided by Soleiman El-Ayyat, a Bedouin who was for many years a rider himself. He also recited to the crowd the Nabati poetry which he learned by heart as a child. There was even a competition to compose new poems specially for the occasion, which attracted many entrants.

The curious thing about Bedouin poetry — which is perhaps not really so curious after all — is that it uses the camel as a metaphor to describe almost anything. Even if the subject is the beauty of a young girl, it is the camel that provides the vehicle to her tenor. Perhaps the Bedouin in love is too engrossed in the image of his lady to look up into the night sky — but he could never forget his camel.

If so, then that simply confirms the truth of the hypothesis advanced at a seminar held during the races to discuss the role of the camel in history: "The first Arab was the first man to tame a camel". The economic life of the Bedouin depends utterly upon the camel. Their love stories are also intimately linked with their favoured mode of transport: witness the legend of Antar Ibn Shadad who gave the father of his beloved Abla 1000 red camels to persuade him to accept their marriage. The camel was the vehicle of pilgrimage before there were cars or planes, and was the means of carrying mail through the desert, and even elsewhere, under the reign of Mohamed Ali Pasha. They are still used by border guards to chase smugglers, as they can run quickly even on the thickest sand.

There wasn't just a race in El-Arish — there was a market tent too, where you could buy woven shawls, cushion covers, jewellery cases, bags, dresses, carpets and other decorative souvenirs — often in the shape of a camel. And in the middle of this tent, there was a big salon in the Bedouin style where visitors could sit and watch the dances of all the tribes participating in the festival.

Dances were also performed every day after the races, on a makeshift stage that was set up in front of stands, where there was space for some four thousand fans. However it seemed more like there were 150,000 Bedouins following the competition. Everywhere you looked, they covered the yellow sand of the desert, jostling together in pleasure and anticipation.

They were sitting on the sandy dunes or under Bedouin tents. They were getting on with their lives, just as usual. The competitors, the fans, and even those who were there to serve others with tea, beans, eggs and hot meals — there's still no Pizza Hut and no McDonald's on the desert side of El-Arish — had come there from every part of the Sinai, from the desert and from the cities. Many had been camping out beside the track for at least four days before the race. Tents were pitched and fires lighted as night drew on, and dances and songs began to well up on every side. And the Bedouins would invite those who had come, by chance or by design, from far away — foreigners and tourists, and fellow Egyptians from the cities — to eat with them. The food was *kabsa* — a dish of meat and rice. You eat it with your hands.

No-can-do?

Despite some less than sparkling form recently, and ever fiercer international competition, the Egyptian tae-kwon-do team are still aiming to shine at the World Championships in Hong Kong. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports on the state of Egypt's martial optimists

The Egyptian tae-kwon-do team, who are used to being ranked in the top ten worldwide, suffered a "temporary" setback when they were only placed thirteenth in last year's World Championships in the Philippines. But that has not discouraged them from preparing strenuously in the hope of taking one of the top positions in this year's competition, which will bring more than 80 countries from all over the world to Hong Kong.

Out of the team of eight, six players are now sponsored by Al-Ahram. The week before last, they finished a two-week tour of several European countries, where they took part in two Open tournaments. The first was the Italian Open, where they met other leading teams, including Korea, Brazil, England, France, Holland and Belgium. Egypt's Yehia Allam (over 83kg), Tamer Abdel-Moneim (under 70kg), Mahmoud Shalabi (over 70kg), and Talat Mabruk (under 64Kg) each won the gold medal in their category. Sabrin Mahmoud (over 70kg) added a silver medal, and the three others took bronze.

The second tournament they took part in, the German Open, had modified its rules in line with those that will be used at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, so there were only four weights (under 58kg, under 68kg, under and above 80kg). The Ahram-sponsored players — Allam, Abdel-Moneim, Shalabi, Mabruk, and Ahmed Zahran — represented Egypt in these new categories. Zahran won a bronze medal, while Allam and Mabruk both made it to their respective finals, only to lose.

Abdel-Moneim and Shalabi were classed in *the same weight category and both made it* through to the finals, but the manager of the Egyptian federation Amr Khairy refused to let them fight each other, for fear of injury (Allam and Mabruk had just been injured in their final bouts). Khairy said: "We don't want this kind of thing happening just before the World Championships." For greater safety, the team has therefore retreated into a training camp at the Olympic Centre in Maadi, and will not be taking part in any other competitions abroad during the run-up period.

In the aftermath of this year's World Cup hosted by Egypt, many voices have been raised within the Egyptian federation to express their concern about the number of countries that have recently joined the World Federation. Some European countries and the US have been trying to recruit professional players from Asia and Egypt to swell their newly-created teams. Khairy has had to admit that some Egyptian players have received "irresistible" offers, and that a few of *them have already accepted*. "*This unexpected* new type of competition is certainly a danger for us," he said.

Until last year, the Egyptian national team used to go on camps in Korea, where they would play friendly matches with their hosts. The Egyptian team was then ranked third in the world, and Korea first. Unfortunately, the year 1997 brought many changes to the established order. It became apparent during the World Cup in Egypt that former underdog teams, such as Mexico and Spain, have finally made it into the top rank. Moreover, the number of countries where tae-kwon-do is played has increased rapidly, thus posing another threat to Egyptian dominance of the sport, at least in the long term.

It has also been announced that Marwa Elhami, who surprised everyone by winning this year's World Cup in her category, will not be travelling with the national team to the World Championships, due to the demands of her studies in medical school. The federation have been trying to convince Elhami to join the national team, since she is the only Egyptian girl who seems certain to win a gold medal, but so far their entreaties have been to no avail.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



Bahgat El-Nadi and Adel Rifaat: One in two

The men formerly known as Mahmoud Hussein have changed with the times

It was the first time in 40 years that Adel Rifaat's name appeared alone. For a very simple reason: Bahgat El-Nadi, who is only one year older than Adel, has reached retirement age. The UNESCO Newsletter, therefore, bore only Adel's name on the masthead.

I went to Bahgat and Adel's office in Paris to discover more. Things were much as they had always been. Bahgat and Adel were still sitting in the same office, where they will stay, together, until they leave next year.

"Together" is never more apt than when applied to this pair, two men with such different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Bahgat is the peasant from a village in Damietta. Adel's not-too-distant roots can be traced to Belgium. He speaks several languages with the fluency of a native, but Arabic with a foreign intonation, like one of Groppi's habitués from the '50s. Bahgat speaks Arabic, English and French with the broad peasant accent of Faraskour. He dresses in the provincial middle-class style: warm, heavy suit and overcoat. He imparts an impression of strength and confidence. Adel, on the other hand, cultivates the taste of the liberal intelligentsia of Brussels, or the transnational cafés of downtown Cairo in the '40s.

To the Lebanese restaurant opposite the UNESCO building in Paris, where they had lunch every day, and where they received their guests. I used to go twice a year. I had to ask them the question which everybody who knows Bahgat-and-Adel inevitably poses: "How were you able to create a single persona, and preserve it for over 40 years?"

It all began in the '50s, when the intelligentsia were searching for a leading role: the liberation of the peasants and workers, and national independence. They met in the circles frequented by the Cairo vanguard, and subsequently joined the same circle of cultivated men, the poets, critics, and well-known artists of later years. This group of young intellectuals had envisaged national liberation as a tidal wave sweeping in economic independence, emancipation of the working classes and full-steam-ahead industrial development. They nurtured a vision of the whole nation rising to create this utopia for the undeveloped and colonised countries. This was their cause, as well as the grounds for their differences with the Nasser regime. Their projects and dreams were based on the "people", whose responsibility was focused on liberating themselves through their own initiative, without administrative or military injunctions. This led to a clash with the regime, which declared that it, too, embraced the same principles regarding the liberation of the people and national development.

Egyptian Marxists — at the time, a predominant force within the country's intelligentsia — clashed with the one-party regime, demanding democracy. In 1959, the regime decided to get rid of the rivals engaging it in an unsavoury competition for the people's love. Hundreds were arrested. Then came the famous "Socialist Decrees" of 1961, and within the prisons' walls, many gradually became reconciled with Nasserism, a process which was to peak in 1964 with a general release of communists and Marxists, followed almost immediately upon by the voluntary dissolution of the major communist organisations in the country.

Few dissented. But among them were El-Nadi and Rifaat, who felt that only one way was left open to them: emigration from their homeland in search of wider horizons. Paris in the '60s was teeming with symbols of radicalism from all over the world. Che Guevara, Mao, Franz Fanon... Theories abounded: world revolution now, the peasants liberating the cities... *Class Struggle in Egypt*, published under the duo's pen name, Mahmoud Hussein, was the thesis that earned them a joint academic degree. It bore their code name for several years and aroused wide interest among the European intelligentsia. Their concept was simple: socialism that does not ensure the people's political freedom is not socialism, but another form of capitalism.

Mao's terminology became fashionable in those days. Strange in the mouth of the Parisian or Belgian intelligentsia, it was common language for Mahmoud Hussein, who came from a country where 70 per cent of the population were poverty-stricken peasants. The last chapter of the book covers the Egyptian students' movement, the "beginning of the way out" of the dilemma in which the nation was placed after the 1967 June war. Another chapter asserts that the Chinese communists had substantial grounds for their differences with Moscow. On the whole, the book is full of the sentiments of those "red" days.

The years went by, and history changed its orientation. Their second book, *The Arabs Today*, appeared in the aftermath of the October War. It chased out the ghosts of radicalism, and of a "sacred" struggle for popular emancipation. These conceptual ghosts were replaced by political realism and a firm belief in the objective development of reality. Notions of development by great leaps and bounds forward were receding. Mahmoud Hussein, too, once a firm advocate of sedition, explosions and revolt, had become an international bureaucrat, the editor-in-chief — in fact, the two editors — of the *UNESCO Newsletter*. Cultural enlightenment stepped in where social revolution had once filled the void.

Everything changed. Only Adel and Bahgat remained constant. When they changed, they did so together. They continued to fuse their identities into that of Mahmoud Hussein. They occupy the same post, in the same office, and have the same secretary.

They made a decision to remain steadfast, never to differ, though the world around them is changing constantly. In the '80s and '90s, a whole ideological bloc crumbled and dissolved. The social revolution became, to the great majority, a wild dream, a remnant of the past. This storm left behind it many victims of ideology everywhere. The world has moved into an epoch that will witness nothing but minor adaptations, the effort to catch up with the liberal West.

"Coming home" in the early '90s was the tentative end of a long exodus. They came to attend the premiere of the film *South of Freedom*, a production that showed their lives and the aspirations that brought them together. The title is taken from a lecture they gave at the Sorbonne, in the Richelieu amphitheatre. Adel and Bahgat speak in the plural form: "we" believe, "we find". Now, however, they speak in defence of "the individual", "the individual's freedom" and "the individual's initiative", as the criteria of progress or underdevelopment, civilisation or the lack of culture.

The individual has taken the place of the people, freedom has replaced equity, and knowledge the vanguard theories. The heated enthusiasm of youth has disappeared, along with the will to conquer and overcome the restrictions on reality through an alliance of the people, or the purpose of the leadership.

I could still see the Red Army platoons, Che Guevara in Bolivia, and the Viet Kong storming Saigon, when the man sitting next to me, a former revolutionary, asked me: "Are you sure these two 'gentlemen' are your friends, Mahmoud Hussein?"

"I think so", I said.

Later, in the Lebanese restaurant, I asked my friends, formerly Mahmoud Hussein: "How did you achieve this change? Do you actually believe in these new concepts?"

They were not in the least confused. They hardly behaved like opportunistic ideologues. They spoke of their early days. Their endeavours then, as at present, have the same objective and goal, the achievement of human dignity. New questions are being posed, to which new answers must be found. They are not sure of the answers that they have now provided, but will continue to seek to ask questions, to fight apathy and stagnation.

The following day, I went back to Cairo, I carried with me a bag full of gifts for Bahgat's family, and books from both of them for their friends, with whom they have maintained nearly weekly contact by telephone throughout the years. Their friendships with those they left behind had survived from the days of their revolutionary dreams, now replaced by belief in development and progress. White hair and other signs of aging are now visible on all concerned. All have changed, and with them Adel and Bahgat. Yet Mahmoud Hussein is still alive, somewhere.

Profile by **Hosni Abdel-Rehim**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ The week was off to a great start. **Ibrahim Nafie**, our chairman of the board and editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* was back at his office, having just returned from Washington where he was undergoing surgery. Our happiness at his safe return was boosted even further when, by sheer coincidence, copies of his latest book, *Historical Dialogues for the Record*, appeared on bookstore shelves practically on the day of his arrival. The book has just been published by Al-Ahram Centre for Translation and Publishing. Nafie has given us the opportunity to share his conversations with world leaders, by recording in this tome all his encounters with the rulers of our global village.

♦ And what a surprise it was, my darlings, to bump into my dear friend **George Bahgory**, just back from France. I did not expect him so soon, as the weather has been quite warm lately and usually **George**'s return heralds the coming of winter to our shores, almost as regularly as the voyages of the little swallows I so adore. Well, George is with us now, and, having planted some apple trees on Boulevard St Germain, he has brought his harvest for you to sample, dears, an experience you will have ample time to savour at the Mashrabiya Gallery starting next week.



Nafie's historical dialogues



George in his Paris studio *photo: Jean Distel*

♠ The regional IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature, for those of us who cannot countenance acronyms), held its North Africa meeting in Cairo recently. Well, it is time we started paying more attention to Chico Mendes's message — yes, I *know* that this is not about Brazil and the rain forest. The aims of this organisation are every bit as noble, however, as it embarks on a programme to conserve medicinal plants, save the cheetah, a beautiful animal on the verge of tumbling into extinction, and to protect hot spots, which are — for those of you who did not attend the meeting — unique, environmentally invaluable sites, threatened by the greed of land developers and other villains. Is your conscience bothering you yet? Participants from Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria were there, as was **Francis Parakatil**, IUCN co-ordinator for North Africa and West Asia. **Martin Sommer** and **Philippe Zahner** were representing the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, which is concerned with environmental projects in the Third World. And as my environmental turn of mind was not able to blunt my sharp observational capacities, I was able to notice among the attendants **Kamal El-Batanouni** and **Samir Ghabbour**, professors of botany and natural resources, respectively, at Cairo University, as well as **Mustafa Abbas Saleh**, professor of ecology at Al-Azhar University and **Ali Abdel-Moneim**, dean of the Faculty of Education at Alexandria University.



Adel Yehya

♣ Having attended such an interesting meeting, I decided that I was going to launch myself in scientific circles in a big way. No sooner had I vowed to succeed brilliantly than I received my invitation from **Adel Yehya**, head of the Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences, to the second Arab Conference on Space Research, Remote Sensing and Geographic Data Systems, which will take place at the Heliopolis Al-Salam Hotel from 2 to 5 November. This conference, held under the auspices of **Mufid Shehab**, minister of higher education and scientific research, aims at encouraging research and cooperation between Arab countries in very specialised fields. I was rather happy to learn that training sessions are on the agenda.

